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Foundations of Eastern Civilization

Course Guidebook

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Grand Valley State University



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Professor Craig G. Benjamin is Associate Professor of History in the Frederik Meijer Honors College at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), where he teaches East Asian civilization, big history, ancient Central Asian history, and historiography to students at all levels,

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For the past six years, Professor Benjamin has taught a two-semester course on East Asian civilization in the Honors College at GVSU. He has also received several awards for teaching, including the 2012 Faculty of Distinction Award from Omicron Delta Kappa Society (a national leadership honor society) and the 2009 Student Award for Faculty Excellence from the GVSU Student Senate.

Professor Benjamin's primary research interest is in ancient Central Asia, specifically the relationship between the great nomadic confederations, such as the Scythians/Saka, Yuezhi, and Xiongnu, and the major civilizations of the period, including Han China and the Roman Empire. He is also involved with teaching and researching big history, a relatively new field that examines the past on the largest possible timescale, from the origins of the universe to the present day. Professor Benjamin has written more than 30 published papers, articles, and book chapters. He is the author of *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria* and *Readings in the*

Historiography of World History and coauthor (with David Christian and Cynthia Stokes Brown) of *Big History: Between Nothing and Everything*. Professor Benjamin has coedited several volumes in the Brepols Silk Road Studies series and is editor of the *Cambridge History of the World*, volume 4, *A World with States, Empires, and Networks, 1200 BCE–900 CE*.

Professor Benjamin is vice-president (and president-elect) of the World History Association and treasurer of the International Big History Association. He is also a consultant for The College Board and a member of the SAT® World History Subject Committee and the Advanced Placement World History Development Committee. In addition to his many professional activities, Professor Benjamin has been featured on The History Channel. Before taking up an academic career, he was a professional musician and jazz educator for 25 years in Australia, playing flute and saxophone. In addition to pursuing his academic and musical interests, Professor Benjamin has spent much of his life hiking and climbing in the great mountain ranges of the world. ■

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Foundations of Eastern Civilization

Scope:

Much has been written about the foundations of Western civilization, from Greek and Roman antiquity through to the present day. Yet Eastern civilizations have also played a significant role in shaping our world, and to truly understand the modern world, it is essential to know something about the many extraordinary contributions Eastern civilization has made. Gaining this knowledge is even more imperative given the incredible dynamism of that region today. East Asia is home to two of the world's top three economies and about 22 percent of the world's population—it matters! As the process of globalization brings our world ever closer together, the foundational ideas of both Eastern and Western civilization are becoming more and more interwoven. Simply put, it is no longer enough to know just the “Western half” of the story; both Eastern and Western are critical to understanding our present and our future.

This course focuses on the history and core foundational achievements of the major cultures and regions of the Eastern Hemisphere, especially China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. It examines the origins and development of the philosophy, science, religion, economics, politics, and social life of these important cultures and measures their influence on other Eastern states, as well as their legacy to the contemporary world. One of the questions we will pursue throughout the course is: How did these nations build on their ancient roots to develop into such successful modern societies? To seek an answer, we must go back to the very beginning of Eastern civilization.

We begin our exploration in China with a consideration of the diverse geography of this, the third-largest nation on earth. We follow Chinese history and culture over thousands of years, from the migration of early foraging humans into the region to the appearance of the first sedentary agricultural communities. It is in the shadowy transition of these early communities into full-blown city-states and, eventually, imperial dynasties that we see the origins of cultural and philosophical ideas that evolved into the core foundational elements of Eastern civilization.

We follow the evolution of the Chinese dynasties and their fundamental political and philosophical ideas—such as the mandate of heaven, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism—from the first Xia dynasty through the Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang. We also look at the Silk Roads in this section of the course, tracing connections that developed among Rome, India, the steppe-nomadic world, and East Asia that led to extraordinary levels of cultural exchange. Perhaps the most significant of these exchanges was the spread of Buddhism into China and East Asia, because this Indian spiritual philosophy quickly became another of the core foundational elements of Eastern civilization.

In the next part of the course, we explore the history and cultural development of three other Eastern regions: Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Despite the powerful influence of China, these societies constructed their own fascinating and unique cultural traditions. We begin with the arrival of early human migrants into the Korean Peninsula and Japanese Archipelago and use the findings of archaeologists to tease out the origins of core cultural ideas that appeared in both regions. We then trace their evolution through to the fascinating Three Kingdoms and Silla periods in Korea and the sophisticated Nara and Heian periods in Japan. In Southeast Asia, we explore the long and complex relationship between China and Vietnam, which resulted in a rich blending of original and imported practices, and we follow the diffusion of Hinduism and Islam into Southeast Asia, which helped shape the extraordinary societies we see in the region today.

After this, we return to China under the creative and economically powerful Song dynasty, before the Mongols arrived to temporarily disrupt the flow of Eastern civilization. The Ming and Qing attempted to restore traditional Chinese cultural practices but were forced to do so in the face of an expansionist West. As China loses sovereignty to Western powers, we return to Korea and Japan to follow their complex relationship with each other—and the rest of the world—into the 20th century.

In the final four lectures of the course, we return to the question of how these nations built on their ancient roots to develop into such successful modern societies. And we ask how many of these foundational ideas still resonate in modern East Asia today. This course unfolds a 10,000-year-long story of

triumph and tragedy without parallel in world history—a story of emperors and peasants, princesses and concubines, Confucians and Legalists, Daoists and Buddhists, camels and silkworms, revolutions, war and peace. We have much to explore, many fascinating people and ideas to encounter, and many historical and cultural threads to follow as we tease out the core elements of Eastern civilization and consider their role in the making of the modern world. ■

Journey to the East

Lecture 1

The Tang Empire in the year 740 C.E. represents a moment in world history when China was undoubtedly the wealthiest and most powerful entity the world had ever seen. The journey upon which we are embarking in this course will take us to the very heart of the extraordinary achievements of Chinese and Eastern civilization. We will explore the “big ideas” of Eastern civilization and see firsthand how these ideas were created and by whom, how they developed and changed over time, and how they eventually spread from their center of origin to engulf the entire Eastern Hemisphere.

Preview of Our Journey

- Many of us are familiar with the material entities—including the iconic structures—produced by the “big ideas” of Eastern civilization. Among these structures is the Great Wall of China, which stretches 5,500 miles along China’s northern borders as a permanent reminder of the struggles that took place in these frontier regions. Here, many Chinese dynasties were forced to defend themselves against the nomadic warriors of the steppes.
- In this course, we will also visit the Forbidden City, that huge complex of residences, temples, and gardens hidden behind protective walls. The city was so isolated that the last emperor of the Ming dynasty had no idea that rebels were about to take the capital of Beijing until the moment he saw them climbing over the walls. Traumatized, he killed his family with his own sword, then hanged himself from a pagoda tree deep inside the Forbidden City.
- We will join Chinese archaeologists as they unearth the thousands of extraordinary life-sized terracotta soldiers, learning what the first emperor of China hoped to achieve in the afterlife with this army frozen in time.

- Although you may already know a little about these structures and artifacts, we'll dig deeper to see how these achievements reflect much more ancient cultural and ideological currents—the great themes of Eastern civilization—and how these monuments continue to reflect the powerful foundational principles that resonate in the region today.
- In addition, we will encounter some lesser-known but equally important people, places, and events. We'll meet First Minister Yu of the Xia dynasty who, 4,000 years ago, labored mightily to bend the flow of the Yangtze River. We'll explore the practice of human sacrifice carried out by the Shang kings and walk through devastated Warring States China, seeking solutions to centuries of civil war.
- Together, we will travel the Silk Roads, riding the Bactrian camels that carried gorgeous Chinese silk to be worn by the wealthy patrician women of Rome. Even as this silk was flowing out of China to Rome, the Indian spiritual philosophy of Buddhism was using the same trade routes to spread eastward into China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.
- We will also explore the rich culture of Korea under its array of glittering dynasties and the story of Japanese culture as it passed through stages from Chinese-influenced opulence to samurai-dominated feudalism, then on to modernization and imperialism.
- This course is also about people, including peasants, such as Hongwu, founder of the Ming dynasty and one of only three peasants who ever ruled China; superb artisans, such as those who created the magnificent Buddhist temples of ancient Korea and Japan; and the awesomely powerful emperors and extraordinary women of East Asia.
- As we will see, much of what we will explore in this course has shaped our world in the West. Gaining insight into developments

in Asia is essential to understanding not only the East but also the interconnected global world of the 21st century.

- China plays a major role in our story because this is where many of the foundational ideas of Eastern civilization first emerged, but China is not the whole story of Eastern civilization. We will also explore the spread of Chinese ideas into other regions of the Eastern Hemisphere: Korea and Japan, Vietnam and Cambodia, Tibet and Central Asia.
- At the same time, we will consider the impact of cultural products that spread into East Asia from other far-flung places, including technologies, foods, and religions. All of these influenced and modified Eastern civilization in fascinating ways.

Defining “Eastern”

- Before we start on our journey, we need to define what we mean by three key words in the title of this course: foundations, Eastern, and civilization. We’ll begin with the word “Eastern.”
- What do we mean when we speak of “Eastern” in the context of this course? In popular culture today, “Eastern” essentially means anything to do with Asia, that is, virtually the entire Asian continent. It is often used in contrast to the term “Western,” which usually denotes Europe and the Americas. This definition, however, is too broad to be useful to us, and it misses some fundamental distinctions.
- In this course, we define “Eastern” to mean the culture and history of China, Korea, Japan, and the nations of Southeast Asia. In focusing solely on this region, we are omitting other important regions that have been traditionally defined as belonging to the Eastern Hemisphere, most obviously, the vast Indian subcontinent. But our definition focuses on those regions of the world that have been profoundly influenced over thousands of years by the cultural achievements of the Chinese.

- As we will see, despite the many fascinating and powerful connections we can trace with other parts of the world, the region that includes China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia collectively constitutes its own distinct and extraordinary solar system, with China as the sun. China has been the cultural giant of the East, and all the other states of the region have found themselves caught up in its gravitational pull, like so many planets orbiting a powerful star.
- It is precisely because of this gravitational pull that it is reasonable to speak of an “Eastern Hemisphere” joined by common cultural ideas, practices, and customs that have united the region throughout history. It is not true, however, that the other states of East Asia were just carbon copies of China. In many ways, the people of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam all developed their own unique ideas and customs.



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The magnificent temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia stand as a testament to the syncretic diversity of Eastern civilization.

Defining “Civilization”

- The word “civilization” comes from a Latin root—*civ*—on which several other words can be constructed, all relating to cities and citizens. Strictly speaking, when we use the word “civilization,” we are describing regions of the world in which cities are the largest and most important communities.
- According to this definition, the word “civilization” should refer only to states that emerged after cities appeared for the first time. These first cities emerged roughly 5,000 years ago in Sumeria, part of modern-day Iraq. The appearance of cities and the civilizations they came to dominate marks the beginning of what “big historians” have labeled the era of agrarian civilizations.
- The appearance of cities, states, and agrarian civilizations did not mean that all other types of human communities suddenly disappeared. Even as great agrarian civilizations spread across Eurasia, millions of humans continued to survive as hunter-gatherers, small-scale subsistence farmers, or pastoral nomads. Here is where we encounter some of the controversy surrounding the word “civilization.”
- In the classical sense of the word, “civilized” is often used to compare and contrast one type of community or lifeway—the so-called civilized community—with peoples who might follow a different lifeway—nomadism, for example—that is often termed “uncivilized.”
 - In other words, “civilized” is used as a value judgment to argue that some lifeways and achievements are superior to others.
 - We will be careful not to pass judgment on varying lifeways in this course, but we will also acknowledge that the great cities and agrarian civilizations of Eurasia quickly became the most dynamic human communities of all.

- Characteristics common to all agrarian civilizations include the fact that they were controlled by states, which are political structures that wield power based on coercion, and that these states supported themselves through the collection of tributes. Agrarian civilizations are also characterized by a complex division of labor, writing and bureaucracies, and steep hierarchies of wealth, gender, power, and ethnicity.

Defining “Foundations”

- “Foundations” is a complex word with many meanings, several of which can be applied to this course.
 - A foundation can be a basis, like a principle or an axiom, on which something stands or is supported, such as the foundational principles of mathematics. It can also be applied more broadly to human communities and lifeways; for example, we can talk about the “foundations of modern society.”
 - In this course, this last meaning is probably closest to what we are trying to do, but it will be useful to keep all these definitions in mind as we go through the lectures.
- Our goal in this course is no less ambitious than to identify, define, and trace the development of all the significant cultural ideas and principles that emerged inside this concept we have defined as “Eastern civilization.” We will also see how these core foundational ideas endured and influenced the development of society and civilization both within the Eastern cultural realm and around the world.
- We have touched on some of these foundational elements already—ideas about government, economic organization, social and gender relationships, religion, philosophy, writing, technology, visual and literary art, and so on. We will explore these core foundational elements of Eastern civilization across vast areas of geographical space and eons of historical time.

Our Path

- Among the essential elements we will discuss about each region we visit are the geography, climate, and ecology of the region, because peoples and their ideas are powerfully shaped by nature.
- After establishing the environmental context, we will look at early human migrants into East Asia and the Stone Age lifeways and beliefs that sustained them. We'll explore the first dwellings—the small communal huts in which common people lived—and the architecture of the great cities into which they evolved. We will enter the temples and monasteries built for the religions of Eastern civilization and see how these faiths competed for the hearts and souls of the untold millions who have lived in the Eastern Hemisphere.
- We will explore some of the richest schools and ideas of philosophy ever devised by humans, particularly Confucianism, whose influence on Eastern civilization has been just as profound as the influence of Plato and Aristotle on the West. We will also consider some of the great works of Eastern literature, as well as the extraordinary technological inventions of Eastern civilization.
- Of course, at its heart, our journey is about the people we will meet along the way: ancient rulers and modern leaders, exotic and brilliant women, and common merchants, peasants, and slaves. Collectively, it is these extraordinary men and women whose lives and achievements have woven the rich tapestry of Eastern civilization.

Suggested Reading

Haiwang, ed., *This Is China*, introduction.

Schirokauer, et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, introduction.

Questions to Consider

1. What ideas come most readily to your mind when you hear the words “Eastern” and “civilization”?
2. Why is it important in the 21st century to be equally aware of the foundations of both Eastern and Western civilization?

Yin and Yang—The Geography of China

Lecture 2

The natural and uncontrollable cycles of nature have influenced the philosophical and religious foundations of Chinese culture. The behavior of rivers, for example, has become a model for the constant flux of natural forces, for the balance between harmony and disharmony, between nature as creator and destroyer. In this lecture, we'll look at the geography of China as a natural entrée to our study of the history and culture of East Asian civilization. First, we'll explore the varied geographical regions of China and the role each has played in the evolution of Chinese history and culture. Then, we'll look at China's two great river systems, each of which can justifiably claim to be the cradle of Eastern civilization.

Geographical Extent of China

- Interestingly, China and the United States share several geographical similarities. They are similar in size, they are both in the middle latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere, and they both have extensive coastlines and similarly diverse topographies. China and the United States also share a historical notion of the Wild West, a literal and metaphorical frontier where some of the key episodes of the histories of both nations have played out.
- With a total land area of almost 10 million square kilometers (more than 3 million square miles), China is the third-largest country in the world after Russia and Canada. At its widest, the distance from eastern to western China is more than 3,200 miles and from northern to southern, more than 3,300 miles. China has a huge land border of approximately 13,500 miles.
- China is bordered today by 14 countries, including North Korea, Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar (or Burma), Laos, and Vietnam. China also has extensive neighboring seas and numerous islands and a coastline that extends for more than 11,000 miles.

- Across the East China Sea to the east and the South China Sea to the southeast lie Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia; these island groups have played a critical role in the dissemination of Eastern civilization.
- More than 5,000 islands are scattered over China's vast territorial seas (the largest is Taiwan), and altogether, China's seas constitute 2.9 million square miles.

General Regional Divisions

- In a country the size of China, it is hardly surprising to find a great variety of topography, climate, and vegetation. It is easiest to understand this variation if we consider China as consisting of four general regions: the eastern alluvial plains, the northern grasslands, the southern hill regions, and the mountainous and often arid west.
- The eastern regions (along the shores of the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea) are densely populated alluvial plains that have been built up by China's great river systems. This region has been densely settled and farmed for many thousands of years. This is where the Longshan and Yangshao cultures first emerged, where all the early dynasties located their capitals, and where such cities as Chang'an and, later, Beijing were founded.
- The northeast plains are covered in fertile black soil that has proven ideal for growing wild grasses, such as wheat, millet, and sorghum, and after it was introduced from the Americas, corn.
 - Here, millions of peasant farmers have labored for millennia to grow the resources needed to support the emperors and their courts, where great battles were waged between warring states, and where some of the densest populations ever seen in world history were sustained.
 - To the north of these fertile plains, along the edges of the Inner Mongolian Plateau in the north, lie extensive grasslands, the home of the pastoral nomadic peoples who have interacted with China's sedentary populations virtually from the beginning of



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Of the world's 14 mountains that measure more than 8,000 meters in altitude, 7 are located in China, including Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world.

history. At various times over thousands of years, the nomads of this steppe region have carved out mighty empires and, indeed, were the people that the Great Walls were constructed to keep out!

- The southern regions of China generally experience benign weather and, topographically, are characterized by hill country and low mountain ranges. The south receives extensive rainfall—up to 60 inches a year in parts—which has helped make the region particularly suitable for rice cultivation.
 - The early selection of different crops species to domesticate in the south and north, based on the environmental conditions in which early farming developed, resulted in the emergence of two quite distinct cultural cuisines: a southern cuisine dominated by rice and a northern cuisine dominated by noodles and grains.

- Rice proved an incredibly versatile food plant to early farmers, who began to harvest and then domesticate it from around 8000 B.C.E. Of course, it eventually became the staple diet across East and Southeast Asia.
- China is a mountainous country; some two-thirds of its total land area is covered by mountains, high hills, and plateaus, and this is particularly obvious in the fourth major geographical zone of China, the west.
 - The highest of these mountain ranges, including the Himalaya, the Karakoram, and the Tien Shan, are all located in the west, where they have acted as a barrier to communication from the beginning of Chinese history.
 - To make these topographical barriers even more formidable, the mountain ranges are interspersed with harsh deserts, such as the Taklimakan and Gobi.
 - With much of China's west consisting of mountains, deserts, and arid plateaus, there has never been much arable land for agriculture in this region; thus, populations have been small and sparse, confined to oasis settlements or pastoral nomadic environments. Chinese civilization naturally emerged in the more arable east and southeast.
 - This meant that, from the very beginning of its history, China was isolated by the "Wild West," cut off from much of the rest of Eurasia and from competing and perhaps expansionist civilizations.
 - From the earliest dynasties, Chinese governments have been forced to focus on overcoming the challenges they faced internally, that is, on connecting these geographically and culturally separate regions to the mainstream of Chinese culture. This led to a focus on internal cultural and ethnic integration, rather than external expansion.

- Although the mountains and deserts of the west limited contact between early imperial dynasties and other centers of civilization in Inner Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe, there were some important and notable exceptions. For example, during certain periods, extraordinary levels of cultural and mercantile exchange took place between China and the rest of Eurasia, particularly along the Silk Roads.

The Huang He and the Yangtze

- The existence of two major rivers—the Huang He (or Yellow River) and the Yangtze (or Chang Jiang)—has been responsible for dividing Chinese culture into two quite distinctive regions. Both of these mighty rivers have their sources in the high Tibetan Plateau, but both follow quite a different path to the sea.
- The Huang He, China's second-largest river, is called the Yellow River because of the huge amounts of silt (yellow loess soil) it carries out from the plains into the sea. The Huang He rises in the mountains of Tibet and flows some 2,920 miles to the Yellow Sea. During its extraordinary journey, the river crosses the high western plateau, then flows through the arid northern deserts before spilling out onto a broad northern alluvial plain.
 - About midway along its course, the river takes a sharp turn to the north, then east, and then south again, before continuing its path toward the sea. This so-called great bend in the Huang He was perceived for much of China's history as a metaphorical and literal frontier, the very edge of the civilized world, beyond which lay the endless and dangerous steppes, home to barbarians.
 - The Huang He is also known as China's Sorrow because of the misery its devastating floods have caused the Chinese people. The earliest settled communities and cultures of East Asia appeared along the Huang He; here, for millennia lived the largest populations and, thus, there existed great potential for devastating floods.

- The other major river of China is the Yangtze, the third longest river in the world after the Nile and the Amazon. The Yangtze flows nearly 4,000 miles down from the Tibetan Plateau, emptying into the sea beside the city of Shanghai. Almost 500 million people—about 1/12 the population of the earth—live in the Yangtze catchment area.
 - The Yangtze also has a great bend, this time to the north, and arguably, this bend has been of even greater consequence to Chinese civilization than the bend in the Yellow River.
 - In southwestern China, all the mountainous valleys of Sichuan province are arranged concertina-like in a north-south direction. The great rivers that flow through the valleys all run from the Tibetan Plateau in the north toward the seas of Southeast Asia. The Yangtze would have gone the same way, leaving China for good at that point, were it not for a singular topographical feature called Cloud Mountain.
 - Cloud Mountain is actually a massive wall of carboniferous limestone that is placed right across the path of the onrushing Yangtze, forcing the river to abruptly interrupt its journey south and turn sharply back to the north.
 - The Yangtze is also the site of one of the largest engineering projects in world history, the Three Gorges Dam.

Man versus Nature

- Perhaps nothing symbolizes the relationship between the Chinese people and the powerful forces of nature that seem to toy with them better than Mao Zedong's two extraordinary swims across the Yangtze.
- Mao's first swim was in 1956, seven years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, when enthusiasm for the Communist revolution appeared to be waning. Mao, who had always loved swimming, decided to use the physical display of his own battle against the brute strength of the Yangtze as a way to galvanize support for his leadership and fearlessness.

- Along with 40 somewhat reluctant members of his entourage, Mao dove into the river and swam across. After about two hours of extraordinary effort, he reached the far bank. In the celebration that followed, one of his advisers made the inevitable connection between the power of nature and the power of their leader: “No one can match the strength of the Chairman.”
- Ten years later, the 73-year-old Mao did it again, his effort symbolizing man’s ability to, if not conquer, than at least compete with the power of nature.

Suggested Reading

Haiwang, ed., *This Is China*, chapter 1.

Winchester, *The River at the Center of the World*.

Questions to Consider

1. How has the geography of China, particularly the two great river systems, influenced the way its history unfolded?
2. What has been the impact on Eastern civilization of the relative isolation of China caused by the formidable geographical barriers in the west?

Early China and the Mysterious Xia

Lecture 3

Fossil discoveries in the area outside Beijing known as Zhoukoudian and in a group of limestone hills on the south side of the Yangtze River have shown that groups of hominid migrants somehow made their way across the vast distances of Asia—all the way from Africa to China—nearly 2 million years ago. Is this where we should begin our search for the foundations of Eastern civilization? We know that our biological and psychological origins must be sought in the extraordinary mix of traits and abilities that characterizes the evolution of our hominid ancestors, but can we also discern our cultural and ideological origins from these same hominids?

Homo erectus and *Homo sapiens*

- *Homo erectus* was one of the last hominids before the appearance of *Homo sapiens*; were these hominids human? They were certainly as tall as we are; they used complex tools; their brains were almost as large as ours; they undertook vast migrations out of Africa; and they used fire in a systematic way.
- But *Homo erectus* did not have the creative cognitive functions of humans, nor the human ability to adapt to a range of environments. Even the most intelligent of our hominid ancestors—*Homo erectus* and the Neanderthals—were no match for *Homo sapiens*, who quickly became the only surviving hominid.
- *Homo sapiens* also emerged in Africa, somewhere between 200,000 and 250,000 years ago. By 100,000 years ago, humans had also made the epic migration to China. In 2007, in the Zhiren Cave in southern China, paleontologists unearthed a human jawbone thought to be at least 100,000 years old, the oldest modern human fossil found outside of Africa.

Lifeways in the Paleolithic Age

- For roughly 90,000 years, the first East Asian peoples formed communities that followed Paleolithic foraging lifeways. Foragers need a large territory to support themselves; thus, populations were kept small through infanticide and senilicide. Foragers generally lived in groups of 10 to 50 people.
- All foragers lived close to nature and thought of themselves as part of the natural world. Many believed that their spirits would return in the form of other animals or natural features of the landscape. Here, we see the emergence of one of the foundations of Eastern civilization: the belief in ancestor spirits and the need to venerate them.
- From about 10,000 years ago, new technologies and lifeways began to appear in China, associated with farming. These developments gave humans access to more energy and resources, and with more food and energy, humans began to multiply more rapidly and live in larger and denser communities. The new level of complexity of the human condition led to the emergence of the first distinctive East Asian cultures.

The Neolithic Age

- The change that began to take place about 10,000 years ago was the transition from the Paleolithic Age to the Neolithic (or New Stone) Age. In China, the Neolithic Age lasted from roughly 8000 to 3000 B.C.E.
- Archaeological evidence shows that numerous Chinese communities had adopted agriculture by at least 6500 B.C.E. and probably 1,000 years earlier in some places. As noted in the previous lecture, climate and geography dictated the different crops grown.
- There are two conflicting theories about how a distinctive Chinese culture emerged in these early Neolithic sedentary communities following the transition from foraging to farming.

- The nuclear area thesis argues that Chinese culture originated from a single culture (probably that of the Yangshao) in the north China plains. This theory is based on evidence of the apparent spread of Yangshao culture—pottery and other material evidence—across northern China, from the coast to the Qinghai plateau.
- The interactive spheres theory, in contrast, argues that Yangshao was just one among many Neolithic Chinese cultures that sprang up in various parts of China, including the Yangshao and Dawenkou in the north and Majiabang and Hemudu in the south. The most important evidence that supports this theory is that each of these cultures produced its own distinctive pottery style. The interactive spheres theory is more widely accepted today.
- The interactive spheres theory also suggests that around 4000 B.C.E., many of these cultures began to trade with each other, leading to convergence and the emergence of a distinctive “Chinese” culture by about 3000 B.C.E. But some critics argue that although there was some degree of convergence, distinctive material culture differences continued to exist in China until quite recently.

Neolithic Cultures

- During the Neolithic era, abundant harvests by successful early farmers seem to have allowed for the development of several different societies, each with its own distinctive pottery style.
- In the north (along the middle Huang He) was the Yangshao culture, which became dominant between 5000 and 3000 B.C.E.
 - Discoveries at Yangshao sites in northern China show that these people lived in communities with both underground and aboveground houses built of wood and earth. They grew millet and domesticated pigs and chickens, but they also continued to hunt and fish.

- Although men held economic and political power in the Yangshao community, we can tell from the types of goods found in male and female graves that women had relatively high social status.
- By 3000 B.C.E., the Longshan culture had emerged in the Huang He Valley.
 - These people coexisted in the north with other agrarian cultures, lived in walled cities, and interacted with their neighbors in various ways that seem to include conflict. Indeed, a major difference between Yangshao and Longshan is that Longshan towns were surrounded with enclosures built of rammed earth—early forms of city walls—a fact that suggests increasing conflict with outsiders.
 - The uneven distribution of wealth in Longshan graves also suggests that this was a much less equal society than its predecessors. This seems to be a historical principle that emerges in virtually all pre-Bronze Age sites around the world: farming, sedentism, and an increasingly complex, interconnected society almost always lead to sharp social inequalities based on wealth, status, and gender.
 - The Longshan cities were mostly located along river valleys, and the walls may have been constructed to provide protection from aggressive nomadic bands who lived in the foothills to the north. The ongoing tension between the two groups became a powerful stimulus for innovation among both the town dwellers and the nomads.
- As this mix of early cultures developed and interacted, as conflict between groups increased, and as social hierarchies emerged, the need for forms of governance and coordination, as well as the ambition to control and dominate other communities, increased. Some of China's earliest historical records, as well as somewhat ambiguous archaeological evidence, seem to suggest that a

powerful dynasty emerged in approximately 2100 B.C.E., which soon gained control of a large part of northern China.

The Xia Dynasty

- Many historians believe that the first dynasty to gain widespread power in China was the Xia, who may have controlled part of the northern regions from roughly 2100 until sometime between 1760 and 1600 B.C.E. The Xia were followed by the Shang, who ruled until about 1050 B.C.E.
- A dynasty is a succession of rulers who belong to the same family (or clan) for generations. But the term is also used to describe the chronological era during which the family or clan reigned, as well as all events, developments, and material culture artifacts that appeared during that period.
- The Xia dynasty is first described in various ancient Chinese documents that were based on an even more ancient oral tradition. The accounts state that the Xia dynasty was founded when a local ruler named Shun gave up his throne to his “perfect civil servant,” First Minister Yu. Because Yu received his title at a place called Xia, that name was chosen for the dynasty.
- This legend resonates with many of the arguments Confucius would later make about the importance of ethical leadership and with the role that Confucian civil servants would play through thousands of years of Chinese government. Certainly, Yu ruled like a great Confucian leader, constructing hydrological works to help control the devastating floods of the great rivers.
- Just before his death, Yu decided to pass power on to his son Qi rather than to the most qualified of his ministers. This act established the precedent for dynastic rule that placed family and clan in political control of the state. Thereafter, some 15 descendants of Qi occupied the throne in hereditary succession.

Educators often use the “Chinese Dynasties Song” (sung to the tune of “Frère Jacques”) to help students remember the Chinese dynasties in order:

*Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han,
Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han,
Sui, Tang, Song,
Sui, Tang, Song,
Yuan, Ming, Qing, Republic,
Yuan, Ming Qing, Republic,
Mao Zedong
Mao Zedong.*

- According to historical records, the Xia dynasty came to end during the reign of Jie, whose dictatorial rule caused a popular revolt, allowing for the Shang tribe to overthrow the Xia and seize the throne in 1766 B.C.E.
- Until about 50 years ago, the ancient literary accounts were dismissed by scholars. But in 1959, excavations in the city of Yanshi uncovered what some claimed was a capital of the Xia dynasty, a site now known as Erlitou.
 - Radiocarbon dates from this site indicate that the Erlitou culture existed from about 2100 to about 1800 B.C.E., contemporaneous with the historical dates for the Xia.
 - Not all scholars accept these discoveries as evidence of the Xia, but they do at least demonstrate the existence of a powerful culture that functioned as some sort of intermediate political and military entity between the Neolithic cultures and the indisputable Shang dynasty.
 - The archaeological evidence shows that the Erlitou/Xia were primarily an agrarian people, but they also built substantial villages and urban centers and mastered the use of bronze. Ruling families used elaborate rituals to confirm their power to govern,

and the rulers also often acted as shamans, communicating with spirits for help and guidance. These developments would play a major role in an emerging Eastern civilization.

- As part of the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, instituted by the Chinese government, scholars from various disciplines came together in 1996 to investigate the literary and archaeological evidence for the existence of the Xia. In 2000, these scholars concluded that the existence of the Xia was proven, with dates from 2070 to 1600 B.C.E.
 - The project's published results provoked significant controversy, and many Western scholars, suspicious of both the motives and methodologies of the project, rejected its findings.
 - Chinese media responses suggested that these Western critics were modern-day imperialists determined to reject any idea that the foundations of Eastern civilization might be almost as ancient as those of Western civilization!
 - Despite three subsequent academic conferences to debate the evidence and findings, the controversy continues, and the dates—even the very existence of the Xia—continue to be one of the most vexing questions in ancient East Asian history.

Suggested Reading

Barnes, *China, Korea and Japan*.

Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Which best explains the origins of Chinese civilization—the nuclear area thesis or the interactive spheres thesis?
2. Is there sufficient evidence to support the existence of the Xia dynasty?

The Coming of the Shang

Lecture 4

As we saw in the last lecture, out of such cultures as the Yangshao and Longshan grew full-blown states and dynasties, which as we will see later in the course, were eventually consolidated into huge civilizations and empires that rivaled those in West Asia in size and power. Our task in the next two lectures is to consider the origins, history, and cultural legacy of the powerful Shang dynasty, the first significant Chinese dynasty and the first for which we have indisputable evidence. In this first lecture on the Shang, we'll focus on some of their distinctive cultural traits and achievements, which went on to become important foundational pieces in an emerging concept of Chinese and Eastern civilization.

Material Evidence for the Shang

- Until the late 1920s, the Shang were just as shadowy as the Xia; there were no excavated cities and no written records. But in that decade, the first tangible evidence for the dynasty began to emerge—on fragments of oxen bones and turtle shells that were discovered in Henan province in northern China.
 - These fragments had been dubbed “dragon bones” by 19th-century apothecaries, who ground them up and sold them as medicinal potions.
 - But as scholars began to look more closely at these bone fragments (now known as oracle bones), they realized that the dragon bones were covered in small symbols. These symbols, we now know, are glyphs, precursors of Chinese writing.
- In the last 50 years, other material evidence for the Shang has emerged, in particular, dozens of enormous tombs of Shang kings and other nobility. These have provided rich evidence and profound insight into Shang society and the power of the dynasty.

- One of the most intriguing insights gained from the tombs is that the Shang sacrificed both animals and humans to royal ancestors and nature gods. The reason behind these sacrifices was probably the same as it was for hundreds of other ancient civilizations: to make offerings to deities for help and to provide the best food, the best resources, and even the best humans to the gods of the civilization in order to keep them strong.
 - One of the tombs excavated at the Shang capital of Anyang was that of a late Shang king who reigned around 1200 B.C.E. Inside it, archaeologists found the remains of 90 sacrificed family members and retainers who had followed their regent into death (possibly voluntarily), plus the remains of 74 other humans, 12 horses, and 11 dogs who had been sacrificed involuntarily!
 - Early in the Shang, all these sacrificial victims were probably either buried alive or murdered before the funeral, but later, many were expected to commit suicide before or during the ritual. The methods used to kill sacrificial victims, which are described in the oracle bones, were brutal—beheading, dismembering, and so on.
 - Each method, however, had a particular ritualized significance and was thought to appease the gods in different ways. In other words, the frequency and methods used to sacrifice victims demonstrate both the cruelty of kings toward their subjects and their extreme religious piety.
- These great burials, including the human sacrifices, took place as part of an elaborate ritual accompanied by music and chanting. Thousands of laborers must have been required to dig the impressive tombs, construct the vast wooden burial chambers, and carry in the hundreds and sometimes thousands of bronze, jade, and other artifacts.
- The Shang ruled a substantial region of northern China from around 1600 to 1050 B.C.E. The Shang state was never huge—certainly not when compared to the vast dynastic empires that would follow—

but the cultural influence of the Shang extended far beyond the borders under their political control.

- We know, for example, that many Shang artistic motifs and technological innovations were adopted by people living far to the south in the Yangtze Valley. We also have indisputable evidence showing that the Shang were responsible for the development of Chinese writing, the creation of a more complex social structure, and the construction of the first large cities in East Asia.
- The Shang institutionalized the practice of ancestor worship and the use of fortune telling as a way of regulating government, which became two of the foundational ritual practices of East Asian culture.

Political and Military Innovations of the Shang

- Among the political influences that flowed out of the Shang dynasty was the absolute power of the king, a power that was based firmly on military superiority. All the evidence suggests that the Shang kings engaged in regular warfare against a range of foes, sending out organized armies of up to 5,000 men on bloody campaigns.
- The Shang system of government was essentially feudal, based on clan birthright and a system of vassal relationships with local leaders, but often, vassals revolted and became enemies, and formerly bitter enemies became allies.
- As we would expect in this age of frequent warfare, military technology made considerable advances in terms of weapons, infrastructure, and tactics. Of course, one of the maxims of world history is that the most significant technological innovations are generally the result of the most intense conflicts.
- The Shang armed forces were composed of horse cavalries, horse-drawn chariots, and foot soldiers. Shang military innovations included equipping soldiers with bronze-tipped spears and arrows,

bronze swords, composite bows, and probably most importantly, horse-drawn chariots.

- Horse-drawn chariots made their appearance around 1200 B.C.E. Some scholars have argued that chariot technology was not a Shang invention but, rather, the result of technological diffusion from West Asia, where the chariot had been used by the Hittites. Other scholars believe it is reasonable to assume that chariots emerged in China independently.
- Chariots gave a number of advantages to the side that possessed them. In campaigns, they enabled commanders to closely observe battle and supervise their troops. They also provided a fast-moving though still relatively stable platform for archers and spear throwers.
- When they were not being used in campaigns, chariots were also used in royal hunts, which doubled as extensive military training operations and sometimes lasted for months.
- Like their Longshan and Xia/Erlitou predecessors, Shang kings also functioned as priests or shamans. The king used oracle bones to communicate with his dead ancestors, and they, in turn, communicated with the supreme god Di. A royal ancestor worship cult emerged, which led to the idea that a patrilineal system of succession must be maintained—to keep open the lines of communication with Di.

Shang Cities

- Archaeology suggests that the Shang may have had five successive capital cities during their half-millennium reign. The most impressive early archaeological evidence for the Shang comes from the site of Anyang in Henan province, which became an important cult center and can justly lay claim to being the first capital city of East Asia.
- At the heart of Anyang (and each of the Shang cities) were the royal palaces and substantial temples and altars built on rammed-earth foundations, one of the most ancient construction techniques known.

- Surrounding the central residential and ceremonial core of the cities were industrial and craft production zones, where bronze workers, stone and jade carvers, potters, and other artisans lived and worked. Beyond this zone were suburbs with small houses, perhaps for agricultural workers, and at the very edge of the city were the burial grounds.
- Earlier Shang cities, such as Ao (close to the modern city of Zhengzhou), show us that the Shang kings had the ability to mobilize vast resources of labor.

Shang Dynasty Bronze

- Despite the cities, the military, and the chariots, the wealth of the Shang is most impressively demonstrated in the sheer volume and quality of its bronze objects. As is the case with the chariot, archaeologists continue to debate the origins of bronze metallurgy in China.
- As noted in our last lecture, the first bronzes in China were made at Erlitou, perhaps under Xia dynastic patronage, and even these first attempts demonstrate wonderfully sophisticated technique. But under Shang government patronage, the scale of bronze production increased dramatically, and massive volumes of bronze artifacts were produced, some as heavy as 200 pounds.
- The quality and quantity of production achieved by the Shang required a large labor pool and careful coordination of activities. This was true at all stages of production, from well-organized mining and transport operations through to the manufacture of clay models and molds, down to the final smelting and engraving of the finished objects.
- The bronze vessels that were produced were exclusively reserved for the ruling elites; peasants continued to use stone tools throughout the Shang period. The beautifully wrought and decorated cups, goblets, cauldrons, and bells were used in sacrificial rituals and burials. In some tombs, hundreds of superb bronze objects

have been discovered, further evidence of the amount of state resources that the elites devoted to bronze manufacturing.

- The so-called Shang bronze sphere describes the extent of Shang-influenced bronze artifacts that have been found widely disbursed throughout modern China. In the absence of any unified Chinese people or homogenous culture, this meant that Shang culture was spreading into areas that were culturally and ethnically alien.

The Tomb of Lady Hao

- The tomb of Lady Hao was discovered by Chinese archaeologists in 1976, when they were probing the ruins of the Shang city of Yin. Lady Hao lived around 1200 B.C.E. and may have been one of the wives of King Wu Ding, because she is mentioned in several of his oracle bone inscriptions.
- These oracle bone inscriptions tell us that Lady Hao was an extraordinary woman in this age of patriarchy. She supervised state rituals, had her own estate outside the capital, and personally led several military campaigns, including an army of 13,000 troops sent against the Qiang barbarians in the west.
- Her small tomb contained 16 humans who had been sacrificed, along with 460 superb bronze objects, 750 jade objects, 70 stone sculptures, 500 hairpins, and nearly 7,000 cowry shells.



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The site of Sanxingdui in the far southern province of Sichuan has yielded evidence of Shang influence in bronze production in the form of life-size bronze heads with large eyes and sharply angular facial features.

- The tomb of Lady Hao, and the fact that of the 700 or so personal names recorded on Shang oracle bones, 170 of them are women's names, might suggest that this was a relatively gender-egalitarian society. Yet despite her wealth and eminence, we should note that one of the oracle inscriptions about Lady Hao says that she was unlucky in childbirth because she gave birth to a girl! Attitudes toward women, often contradictory and ambiguous, will constitute a crucial theme in future lectures.

Suggested Reading

Allen, *The Shape of the Turtle*.

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 1.

Questions to Consider

1. What sort of political structure did the Shang put in place, and how influential was it on the subsequent history of China?
2. How did Shang elites use bronze metallurgy and lavish ritual to enhance their power?

The Shang and Writing for the Gods

Lecture 5

In the early 20th century, archaeological excavations uncovered some 20,000 oracle bones—fragments of bone and shell bearing markings that seemed to be some form of ancient Chinese writing. Once the inscriptions on the fragments were deciphered, scholars realized that they were priceless records of the divinations performed for or by various ancient royal households. In this lecture, we'll discuss the insights provided by the oracle bones on the origins of Chinese writing. We will then consider some of the translations of the oracle bones in terms of the evidence they provide for Shang religious practice and social organization. Finally, we'll look at one of the core philosophical beliefs of Eastern civilization, the concept of yin and yang.

Origins of Chinese Writing

- Unlike the beginning of most other writing systems, such as those of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the origins of Chinese writing are difficult to trace. The great majority of specialists in this field agree that Chinese script first appeared sometime before 1200 B.C.E., during the Shang dynasty, as a purely Chinese invention.
- Several incorrect ideas about Chinese writing persist in the West. For example, many believe that Chinese script consists solely of pictographs (stylized representations of objects). Others believe that Chinese writing consists mostly of ideographs (symbols that represent more complex concepts). Although both of these symbol types exist in the Chinese writing system, they do so in very small numbers.
- In fact, logographs make up more than 80 percent of all Chinese characters. Logographs are symbols formed of two elements: The semantic element suggests the meaning of the word, and the phonetic element gives some clue about how it should sound.

- The writing found on the oracle bones of the late Shang dynasty was already developed enough to include complete sentences. And it is this ancient script that evolved into the standard logographic writing system still used in China today.
- The beginning of most ancient writing seems to be bound up in list making, generally to create accounts of resources collected as tribute by the state or donated to a temple. This might also be true of the Shang writing system, but we have no evidence to support the idea that Shang writing evolved from earlier accounting systems.
- In all early writing systems, whatever their original purpose, it is surprising how quickly keeping lists led to attempts to write down higher-order thinking. As we have seen, the Shang kings were able to use their symbols to write complete sentences on the oracle bones and to ask complex, even symbolic questions of the gods.
- The adoption of a logographic system had tremendous consequences for Chinese and East Asian civilization. The script was so difficult that it required many years of study to master. This led to the emergence of a highly educated literary elite that went on to become the scholar-bureaucrat class—the great Confucian scholars who came to dominate Chinese and East Asian government and culture.



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A government official named Wang Yirong and his friend, a scholar named Liu E, are said to have recognized ancient Chinese writing on a turtle shell they were grinding into powder as a treatment for malaria.

- The script also helped with the process of assimilation of the various peoples and ethnicities who dwelt in ancient China. Because elite members of these ethnic groups had to learn Chinese writing for all sorts of pragmatic reasons—to communicate with authorities, trade, study Chinese literature and philosophy, and so on—they were inevitably drawn deeper into the rich culture of the Chinese.

Insights of the Oracle Bones

- As well as providing insights into the origins of Chinese writing, the oracle bones also offer evidence of the type of government, religion, and society constructed by the Shang.
- In essence, the way the system of oracle bones worked was as follows: The king would have a question written on the bone or shell addressed to his ancestor spirits. His priests would then put a hot bronze tool inside the bone, and together, monarch and priests would interpret the answer by the way the bone cracked. Oracle bone divination was, thus, a way of using ancestral spirits to communicate with the deities.
- The oracle bone inscriptions (along with other inscriptions found on thousands of Shang bronzes) show us how deeply this notion of ancestor worship was embedded in Shang religion and government.
 - The Shang kings believed that their ancestors played a hands-on role in the daily life and fortunes of the state. They asked their ancestors to intercede with the supreme deity Di to ensure good harvests and to avoid calamities and disasters in war.
 - This meant that the power and legitimacy of the Shang kings depended to a certain extent on the success of his ancestors at communicating with Di.
- The critical role played by these spirits of dead ancestors in daily life explains why so much attention was paid to death and burials. As we saw in our last lecture, all the Shang elites, from the king down to lesser members of the family, were buried in tremendous style.

- The number of sacrificial victims found in the tombs—up to several hundred individuals, both voluntary and involuntary sacrifices—is further evidence of the importance of the burial of the “special dead,” whose spirits were expected to survive and remain in contact with both the gods of heaven and their elite successors here on earth.
- Ancestor worship is one of the key foundational ideas of Eastern civilization. From its appearance in the Shang dynasty, the notion that it is an obligation of living family members to provide dead family members with comfort and well-being in the afterlife has continued for more than 3,000 years.
- Oracle bones have also been useful for historians interested in Shang society. From the bones we have learned, for example, about Shang farming techniques, methods for domesticating animals, methods for treating illnesses, the operation of the sophisticated legal system, and the organization of textile manufacturing.
 - Rigidly hierarchical Shang society was a reflection or parallel of a similar order in heaven. In the real world, the king was at the pinnacle of a hierarchical social structure, with lesser elites, scribes, and administrators arranged in descending status levels below. Only the king and his priests, through the intermediary of the dead ancestors, could communicate with the supreme deity.
 - At the bottom of the social structure were the peasants, who had no mobility and few rights. These subsistence farmers grew millet, wheat, rice, and barley; they had domesticated pigs, dogs, sheep, oxen, and silkworms; and they worked small plots of land with only primitive wooden and stone tools.
 - The heavenly world was a virtual mirror of Shang society. Di was the supreme god atop a similarly hierarchical social structure. Below Di were gods who controlled the rivers, mountains, and all the aspects of nature that were home to spirits. Connecting the two realms were the royal ancestor spirits.

- The hereditary Shang king and his ancestral advisers were, thus, the sole link between the people and the spirit world. As was the case throughout the ancient and premodern world, this mix of sacred and secular power gave the Shang kings enormous claims to legitimacy, but it also came with a significant responsibility, particularly if the heavenly prophecies were proven wrong and calamities ensued.

Yin and Yang

- The oracle bones provide us with the earliest evidence of the original meaning of the defining cultural idea of yin and yang.
 - Indeed, the earliest Chinese characters for yin and yang are found in inscriptions made on some of the oracle bones.
 - In these prophetic inscriptions, the symbols for yin and yang are used in a pragmatic way, to describe natural phenomena, such as weather conditions or the movement of the sun. The yang symbol is used to show sunlight during the day; the yin, to suggest a lack of sunlight at night.
 - There is no clear suggestion in the oracle bones that these two symbols had any deeper philosophical or spiritual significance under the Shang.
- Whatever their original function might have been, the concept of yin and yang became deeply embedded in the Chinese psyche, evolving into a complex philosophy that persists to this day.
- The earliest comprehensive dictionary we have of the meaning of Chinese characters, compiled during the early Han dynasty, shows that by about 100 B.C.E., the yin and yang symbols had acquired considerably more complicated meaning since their first appearance 1,100 years earlier.
 - Here, yin is described as “a closed door, darkness, the south bank of a river, and the north side of a mountain.” Yang is explained as “height, brightness, and the south side of a mountain.”

- Some scholars believe that these meanings of yin and yang came from the daily life experiences of the people of the Shang and Zhou dynasties.
- The peasant way of life, based on the cycle of day and night, might have led to the idea that yang (the sun) must be associated with movement and activity, and yin, with rest and passivity.
- In their earliest use on the oracle bones, the words “yin” and “yang” seemed to exist as independent entities and were not necessarily connected. But by the late Zhou dynasty, a philosophical school had emerged that actually bore the name “yinyang.” By the Han dynasty, yinyang had become associated with an astrological philosophy that attempted to work out cosmology in a metaphysical manner.
- The most enduring interpretation of yinyang, however, relates to its association with the concept of chi—vital energy. In this interpretation, both yin and yang are seen as chi energy that operates in a balanced form everywhere in the universe. In the Zhou dynasty, an argument appeared that yin and yang must exist in balance to ensure the harmony of the cosmos.
- As we will see in a future lecture, this fascinating philosophy, with its roots in the natural cycle of day and night, described by symbols that first appear among the earliest examples of Chinese writing, would go on to be used as an argument for political legitimacy by various governments and as a means to justify the subordination of women (the yin) by men (the yang).

Suggested Reading

Allen, *The Shape of the Turtle*.

De Bary and Lufrano, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, volume I.

Questions to Consider

1. What do the oracle bone inscriptions tell us about the power of the king and his relationship with the gods?
2. What is the concept of yin and yang, and why has it been so influential in Chinese culture?

The Zhou and the Mandate of Heaven

Lecture 6

Thus far, we have traced the evolution of Chinese and East Asian civilization from the first farming communities through to the emergence of impressive dynasties. We have seen how villages grew into cities and how leaders used a combination of sacred and secular power to rule over their people. Already by 1100 B.C.E., many of the foundations of East Asian civilization were in place to facilitate this system of government, including patrilineal succession, the worship of ancestor spirits, rigid social hierarchy, standing armies, bronze metallurgy, and writing. In this lecture, we'll see how the successors of the Shang, the Zhou dynasty, introduced a new and durable concept of government to justify their seizure of power—the mandate of heaven.

A Mandate from the Gods

- Sometime around 1050 B.C.E., the powerful Zhou tribe rose up in the Wei River valley of western China, invaded the central plains, and attacked the Shang. The Zhou had built a coalition of partners among disaffected states that were all tribute-paying subjects of the Shang; they used this coalition effectively to destroy Shang power.
- To justify their seizure of power, the Zhou accused the late Shang kings of corrupt rule. In contrast, the Zhou dynasty was seen by later historians as one based on fair rule and the humane treatment of subjects and conquests. Of course, we must be careful in interpreting these written arguments, which as is often the case in history, were written by the victors.
- For many later Chinese thinkers, the victory of the Zhou was seen as a momentous event that expressed the will of heaven itself.
 - Two centuries after the Zhou destruction of the Shang, arguments appeared in the *Book of Odes* suggesting that the shift in power was the result of the Zhou being granted the “mandate of heaven.”



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The Book of Odes argued that the Zhou represented not just a more suitably moral government than the Shang but one that was actually commanded by an impartial heaven.

- The theory was that the gods had the ability to take power from any earthly group that had become unfit to rule, such as the Shang, and pass that power to another group that was more morally suited to rule, in this case, the Zhou.
- This concept of the mandate of heaven continued to resonate in Chinese political history for 3,000 years, remaining in effect until the fall of the last dynasty ever to rule China—the Qing in 1911/1912—and, to a certain extent, is still in the background of government arguments about legitimacy today.

The Rise of the Zhou

- The Zhou are mentioned in the Shang oracle bones in various capacities—as foreign enemies, embittered allies, and a powerful foe—before they disappear completely from the bone inscriptions. The Zhou might have been an alien people, culturally distinct from the Shang but connected to other western tribes that placed an emphasis on military ritual.
- After the Zhou seized power from the Shang, the king ruled the core homeland in the Wei Valley, while the brothers and nephews of the king defended and managed territories to the north. The early kings ruled from the western capital of Hao near Xian (hence the

designation Western Zhou dynasty), consolidating their power through military and commercial expansion.

- At the height of Western Zhou rule, between the late 10th and late 9th centuries B.C.E., the kings had power over a huge territory, ranging from Gansu in the west to the Beijing region in the northeast and including Sichuan in the southwest and the Yangtze River valley in the southeast. The first three Zhou kings are given great credit in the Zhou texts for establishing a stable and successful state and facilitating its spectacular expansion.
- The Zhou kings soon began to monopolize certain valuable resources and used these to establish a system of political loyalty through tribute taking and gift giving. All the valuable objects of Shang religion and tribute—bronze, jade, and cowry shells—were thus used by the Zhou as a means of ensuring political control.

Zhou Religious Ideas

- In the beginning, Zhou kings worshiped the Shang gods, but by the mid-10th century, Zhou ancestor spirits had become the objects of veneration. As the Zhou began to reward their loyal supporters with material gifts, the recipients were expected to use many of these same items in feasts and sacrifices to the Zhou ancestor spirits.
- The Zhou kings prayed directly to heaven, or *Dian*, which they regarded as a model of how the world should operate. Like those of the Shang, Zhou religious practices linked the hierarchy of heaven with hierarchical society on earth, each a reflection of the other.
- The use of oracle bones declined under the Zhou, replaced by a new divination system outlined in the *Book of Changes*, the *I Ching*, which involved the interpretation of randomly selected sets of broken and unbroken lines.

Fragmentation of the Western Dynasty

- The Zhou kings charged their relatives with governing and defending certain territories, but over the centuries, the bonds of

blood and family stretched thinner, until many of these vassals were only nominally ruling in the name of the king. The state fragmented into a series of regional kingdoms only loosely affiliated with the Zhou court.

- The nobles whom the king designated to rule held their lands at his will and were required to provide troops to fight for him.
- Under the early Zhou kings, who were successful in war and politics, this system worked well. But after the first two centuries of the Zhou dynasty, a series of weak kings, along with increasingly independent vassals, lessened the power of the throne.
- The death knell for the Western Zhou came in 771 B.C., when King You decided to replace his queen with a concubine. The legitimate queen's father, the powerful marquis of Shen, was so outraged that he attacked and sacked the Zhou capital. The queen's son was proclaimed the new king by the nobles from four states.
- The capital was then moved eastward to a new capital near Zhengzhou in present-day Henan province; it is because of this incident that historians divide the Zhou dynasty into the Western Zhou (which lasted until 771 B.C.E.) and the Eastern Zhou (from 770 to 256 B.C.E.).

The Spring and Autumn Period

- The Eastern Zhou era is further divided into two subperiods. The first of these, which lasted from 722 to 481 B.C.E., is called the Spring and Autumn Period, after the great historical chronicle of the time. The second is known as the Warring States Period, named after another chronicle; the Warring States lasted from 480 to 256 B.C.E.
- Throughout the changes, the Zhou royal family managed to hang on, although they ruled in a ceremonial capacity only. Real power now lay in the hands of former vassals, regional kings, warlords, and alien tribes. The formerly powerful Zhou kings were puppets of

the forces of the various regional states that jockeyed for control in a fragmented and hostile environment.

- During the Spring and Autumn Period, more than 150 kingdoms coexisted with the Zhou. The strong states launched wars to expand their territories, forcing small states to accept their hegemony. From the annals, we learn that during the Spring and Autumn Period, at least 36 kings were killed and 52 vassal states were demolished.
- The constant conflict and annexation of one state by another hastened social and economic change and had the effect of more deeply integrating people of different tribes and ethnicities into a more homogenous “Chinese” culture. Indeed, despite war and political instability, the later Zhou was one of the most culturally, socially, and technologically creative eras in all of China’s long history.
 - It was during the Spring and Autumn Period, for example, that China entered the Iron Age. The appearance of the iron-tipped plow, drawn by an ox, increased agricultural output significantly, allowing for rapid population growth, despite the regular decimation caused by incessant warfare.
 - Commerce also expanded during the period, with cowry shells, spade-shaped “money” cast from bronze, silk, and ingots of gold and silver all used as mediums of exchange.
- As Zhou dynastic power weakened after the 9th century B.C.E., the formerly rigid social hierarchy also began to change. Land could now be purchased by those with money, rather than just inherited by the nobility, allowing for the possibility that members of lower social orders might achieve elite status. In fact, a wealthier middle class emerged for almost the first time in Chinese history.
- As a result of this period of drastic upheaval, what had been several hundred smaller states were reconstituted into a handful of megastates, and the Zhou dynasty entered its endgame: the Warring States Period.

The Warring States Period

- Some formerly powerful states were destroyed during the Warring States Period, but others, such as Qin and Chu, occupying regions outside the heartland of the central plains, became increasingly formidable. The Qin were based in the northwest, centered on the fertile Wei River valley, where they enjoyed several strategic advantages. The Chu were located much further to the south, in the Yangtze River valley.
- During the Warring States, Qin and Chu fought each other and the other mega-states of China on a scale hitherto unseen in human history.
 - We read in the annals that armies as large as 600,000 infantry fought massive battles in campaigns that lasted between one and five years, although these figures must surely be exaggerated.
 - New and deadlier weapons were developed, such as the crossbow. This was also the age in which one of the greatest books on military strategy of all time was written: Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.
- The rulers of the Qin state, under the guidance of clever political advisers, abolished the estates of the nobility, introduced near-universal military conscription, and instituted a system of direct taxation to increase their revenues, all of which strengthened the power of the state.
- By the late 4th century B.C.E., the Qin were poised to take on all their rivals. In 316, they defeated the state of Shu (in modern Sichuan); four years later, they defeated the second most powerful state, Chu, at the Battle of Danyang. Despite this Qin victory, the Zhou dynasty kings managed to hold on to some remnants of power for another half century, until 256 B.C.E., when the last king was deposed.
- The chaotic late centuries of the Zhou dynasty brought political and military confusion, but it was this very disunity and conflict that led to great advances in Zhou literature, social structures, economic

activity, and technological innovation. The chaos also helps explain why rich schools of philosophy emerged in the later Zhou dynasty, as a direct product of a profound reflection on the nature of society and the role of the individual and government in ensuring harmony.

Suggested Reading

Schirokauer, et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 1.

Tanner, *China. A History*, part 1, chapters 1–2.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the mandate of heaven, and why has it been so influential in Chinese political history?
2. Why did the Zhou dynasty fracture into a semi-feudal system of government, and why was the period of endless warfare that followed also one of the most creative and dynamic periods in Chinese intellectual history?

Great Ideas of the Zhou—Confucianism

Lecture 7

Between the 6th and 3rd centuries B.C.E., during a period of political, military, and social upheaval, a series of great Chinese thinkers profoundly considered the nature of society and government. The philosophies they created—Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism—have substantially shaped Chinese culture ever since. Of these three ideologies, the most enduring has been Confucianism, whose beliefs continue to resonate in China today. In this lecture, we will look at the life of Confucius and *The Analects*, the book that is purported to be his sayings. We will then describe the important social and political innovations that Confucius introduced into East Asian culture. Finally, we will try to get at the heart of Confucian philosophy, its core beliefs and values.

Confucianism in the Modern Era

- The extraordinary growth in China's economy over the past decade has been clouded somewhat by such problems as an increasing crime rate, unemployment, corruption, and a widening wealth gap. These social problems have sent many Chinese thinkers back to the teachings of the 6th-century-B.C.E. philosopher Confucius in search of possible solutions.
- The idea that only a recommitment to Confucianism can rebuild China's moral and social standards resonates almost as strongly today among intellectuals and policymakers as it did more than 2,000 years ago. Indeed, for the past two and a half millennia, the guiding philosophy of China and much of East Asia has been Confucianism.
- The emphasis of Confucianism on ethical leadership, moral behavior, and the acceptance of one's proper place in society is seen by many as providing the sort of ethical integrity that has been eroded by China's rapid recent growth. Still, some academics have argued that Confucianism is not appropriate for modern China, which should

embrace more tangible systems of government accountability, such as the Western rule of law and democratic elections.

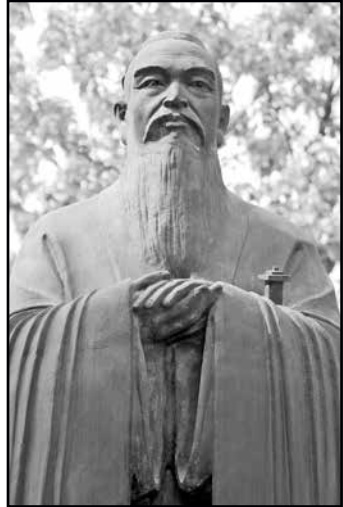
- The ongoing debate about Confucianism is astonishing when we think of Confucius himself—a member of the lower nobility who left none of his own writings behind. But his ideas have survived to become one of the cornerstones of Eastern civilization; they remain just as influential and relevant in East Asia today as Socratic philosophy is in the West.

The Life of Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.)

- Most scholars agree that Confucius was born around 551 B.C.E. as a member of the lower aristocracy in the minor northeastern state of Lu. After his early education, he spent several years seeking an influential post as a political adviser in the Lu court.
- When no position came his way, Confucius set out on a journey around the territories of the Zhou dynasty and spent the next 10 to 12 years seeking employment in some of the other courts during the violent Spring and Autumn Period.
- Again, he had no success, and in 484, Confucius returned to Lu a bitterly disappointed man. He died there 5 years later.
- Although Confucius never obtained the powerful political position he so desired, he served as a respected educator and mentor throughout his career.
- It's important to note that the life of Confucius roughly corresponds to the lives of some of the greatest thinkers of all time during a fertile period between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C.E. that has been called the Axial Age. As the philosopher Karl Jaspers famously put it, during this age, “the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, and Greece. And these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today.”

The Analects

- The main source for both the life of Confucius and his philosophy is an ancient text known as *The Analects*. Most scholars agree that *The Analects* was not actually written by Confucius. The traditional view of *The Analects* is that it contains the teachings of Confucius as they were transmitted verbally by him and written down by his disciples.
- The statements made by Confucius were collected and transcribed, often in the form of answers to specific questions posed by his students. Thus, *The Analects* does not provide a clear statement of Confucian philosophy. Instead, it reads as a collection of seemingly disconnected conversations that include pronouncements open to all sorts of interpretation.
 - The endless reinterpretations that *The Analects* has been subjected to in ever-changing intellectual and social contexts for the past 2,500 years has meant that “pure” Confucianism (if there ever was such a thing) is difficult to pin down.
 - But this also means that Confucianism has never fallen out of favor, because people of every age have been able to find something inside *The Analects* that is relevant to their own time and place and to the problems that all societies face.



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Confucianism was a genuine political philosophy meant to define the essential duties and obligations of correct living during a time of social and political upheaval; it was never intended to be a religion.

Social and Political Innovations

- Confucius was responsible for three great innovations in his life. The first of these was the creation of his own occupation as a private teacher.
 - Confucius was a lifelong scholar, yet the Zhou dynasty had no institutions in place for formally transmitting knowledge attained by such sages, particularly to potential members of the governing class. Those positions were filled exclusively based on nobility of birth, rather than on the degree of knowledge or political skill an individual possessed.
 - As the most learned man in the Lu court, Confucius must have been consulted regularly by others seeking his knowledge and opinions, which means that he may have slipped into the role of teacher without ever really intending to.
 - Because he was actively involved in thinking about the problems of his day, he established, as Confucian scholar Frederick Mote put it, “the pattern of student-teacher relations and the model of the professional teacher so effectively that they quickly became standard throughout the society and were never challenged by any subsequent competing models.”
- Critical to the transmission of Confucian philosophy were the many students that Confucius attracted throughout his life and travels. In a second quite radical innovation, he collected these disciples from all different social classes.
 - Confucius insisted that the title *junzi* (“princeling”), which up until his time had been applied only to the sons of the aristocracy, should now apply to “superior men” who had achieved a high level of ethical and intellectual cultivation.
 - This was a revolutionary redefinition of the criterion for assigning status in Chinese society, which some scholars interpret as a conscious attempt on Confucius’s part to encourage social mobility.

- With the acceptance of his role as professional educator and this building of a corps of students from various social classes, Confucius turned his attention to the core content of his evolving curriculum and, in so doing, completed his third innovation: developing an educational curriculum.
 - Confucius believed in a broad liberal arts curriculum. What the *junzi* needed was a knowledge of poetry, art, history, ethics, science, government, music, and athletics.
 - Confucius and his disciples studied the great works of poetry and history produced during the Zhou dynasty. They carefully considered which of these books offered the most profound insights into human nature and which would be most useful in imparting the sort of skills required by future administrators.

Overview of Confucian Philosophy

- Confucius chose to articulate his ideas around certain key words whose definitions—then and now—are vague. It’s also important to note that Confucian thought is much more practical than that of other thinkers of the Axial Age. In response to the violence and disunity of his time, Confucius seems to have attempted to build into the prevailing social hierarchy an ethical framework based on the behavior and relationships of officials.
- In an age when bureaucratic institutions were not fully developed, Confucius argued, the best way to promote good government was to fill official positions with individuals who were well educated, conscientious, and ethical. To do this, one needed to concentrate on creating *junzu*—superior individuals—through effective educational pedagogy and curriculum. The Confucians offered a practical way of improving statecraft that had the potential to create a better life for all.
- For Confucius, it was critically important for an ethical man to possess certain values.
 - The primary virtue of a *junzi* was *ren*, which can be translated as kindness, benevolence, or a sense of humanity. The

practice of *ren* required officials in particular to be courteous, respectful, diligent, and loyal; to express concern for others; and to possess a deep understanding of the human condition.

- The second most important quality of a *junzi* was *qi*, meaning intelligence or wisdom. For Confucius, this meant having knowledge, certainly, but also the ability to apply it in an appropriate manner and to decide on the correct action in all situations.
- *Qi* also implied the possession of another important characteristic, *yung*, meaning courage—essentially, the courage to act on one's judgments no matter how high the stakes!
- Confucius espoused two other values: *li* and *xiao*. *Li* was understood as having a sense of propriety, of being dutiful in carrying out the essential tasks of a *junzi*, particularly a government official. *Xiao* meant filial piety, a reflection of the great significance of family in Chinese society.
- Ultimately, Confucius and his followers believed that individuals who possessed these virtues would be so esteemed by their colleagues and contemporaries that they would gain influence in wider society as mentors, teachers, and government officials. These moral, wise, courageous, and self-controlled *junzu* would lead others by their noble example, and only through such enlightened leadership was there any hope for the restoration of political and social order in late Zhou dynasty China.
- Confucius's goal was not to use his system of advanced education to create *junzu* as some intellectual exercise or for their own personal benefit. Rather, only with these leaders could order and stability be restored to society and the chaos of the Spring and Autumn Period resolved.
- Confucius believed in restoring a sense of moral responsibility in the ruling classes, which he felt had been lost in his own times.

Thus, we find in *The Analects* a clear concern for the rights of all other humans in a sort of reverse version of the Golden Rule: “Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”

- Despite this ethical quality, Confucianism has often been interpreted as essentially a justification of the hierarchical society into which Confucius was born. But we should note that Confucius was trying to use the education system he and his followers had devised to create the superior man, who was not necessarily an aristocrat. Such a man could be from any strata of society; he attained intellectual and ethical superiority through his acquisition of the primary virtues.

Suggested Reading

Confucius (Leys, trans.), *The Analects of Confucius*.

Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. How were the life experiences of Confucius crucial to the development of his extraordinary philosophy?
2. How do the virtues enumerated by Confucius apply in the modern practice of statecraft?

Great Ideas of the Zhou—Later Confucianism

Lecture 8

In the context of the Warring States Period, many philosophers continued to debate their calamitous times, looking for the sort of answers that Confucius had sought to the problems of a society torn apart by warfare and unethical officials. In fact, so many great philosophical minds were active in the later Zhou dynasty that it has come to be known as the period of the Hundred Schools. In this lecture, we will touch briefly on some of the lines of thought that came in the wake of Confucius before turning our attention to two great Confucians of the late Zhou period: Mencius and Xunzi.

The Philosophy of Mohism

- Mohism was another fascinating philosophy of the late Zhou, the intellectual invention of a skilled carpenter, Mozi, from Shandong province.
- Mozi differed from the Confucians by emphasizing self-reflection and personal authenticity, rather than obedience to ritual, as being the key to moral cultivation.
 - In the midst of the Warring States Period, Mozi argued that humans learn best about the world through adversity and their responses to personal setbacks.
 - His approach thus demanded continual self-reflection on both one's successes and failures in life, because it is only through this continuous, honest reflection that humans can attain true self-knowledge, something denied to those who know only how to conform to ritual.
- In the key text of Mohism, much of which was lost over the centuries, Mozi urged the people of the late Zhou to lead a life of asceticism and self-restraint, to renounce any form of material or spiritual extravagance.

Later Development of Confucianism

- After Confucius's death, a series of separate traditions or sub-schools of Confucianism emerged.
 - One of these focused on the idea of filial piety and the spiritual nature of Confucius's teachings.
 - Another investigated the nature of ritual and started to see formal ceremonies as quasi-religious observances, much more so than Confucius himself had ever intended.
 - The third school of Confucians was more pragmatic and practical, concerned with the applications of their philosophy to the art of politics and government.
 - A fourth group of Confucians became known for their exploration of the metaphysical implications of Confucianism, that is, what *The Analects* might have to say about the meaning of existence.
- These various avenues that were pursued by scholars after the master's death demonstrate the extraordinary capacity for growth that Confucianism possessed. The wide variety of schools that emerged was a testament to the quality of the intellectuals who lived at the time but also to the particular environment of the Warring States Period.
- In the isolated but intellectually vibrant late Zhou world, the diverse schools of Chinese philosophy intermingled and competed with one another for superiority.
 - But the Confucians, in their pursuit of several distinct aspects of Confucian teaching, lost sight of the bigger picture, of the ethical and proactive heart of Confucianism.
 - Mencius, an itinerant, wandering scholar, rediscovered the ability to conceive of the whole, and it is he who must be credited with saving Confucianism from potentially permanent fragmentation and possible obscurity.

Mencius (371–289 B.C.E.)

- Mencius was born a century after the death of Confucius in the state of Zou in modern Shandong province. In many ways, his life mirrored that of his self-professed mentor. Like Confucius, he was frustrated by his inability to gain an influential position as a political adviser, and he, too, spent much of his life traveling from court to court seeking employment. He is also best known today from a book, the *Mencius*, that he did not write.
- It is clear that Mencius was recognized as the most learned man of his day and was acknowledged by Confucians as the spokesman for the philosophy. Because of this, he was able to restore to Confucianism the cohesion that had threatened to dissolve it during the preceding century.
- Despite his reputation, Mencius was frustrated by his inability to obtain any sort of high office. He believed that he had the knowledge and ability to reform the world of the Warring States Period, but no court offered him the opportunity to demonstrate his capabilities.
- Mencius made major contributions to Confucian philosophy in two distinct areas: human nature and political theory. The solutions he espoused seem to go beyond any record of Confucius's own thinking, but they also seem logical extensions of Confucian views.
- In political theory, Confucius and his disciples had recognized the existence of the state as a logical extension of the need for humans to associate with one another in some form of society. This implied that some form of a state must exist—to facilitate this social association. Further, it was tacitly assumed that a monarchy was the only type of state that could exist.
 - But because two types of states existed in the Warring States Period—the monarchy and the military state (ruled by a warlord)—Mencius saw other possibilities. Acutely aware of the chaos and suffering of his times, he was bitterly opposed to the military state.

- In a radical declaration, he argued that when a ruler stops acting like a king, he has lost the right to rule; the people then have the right to rebel against and even murder the tyrannical leader, who no longer deserves to be king!
- At the heart of this argument was the assumption that the state exists for the people, not the other way around. The most important people in the state, therefore, are the people, not the rulers, and the mandate of heaven was essentially the people, not gods, giving legitimacy to rulers. This was a radical redefinition of the mandate of heaven.
- As radical as Mencius's political theories were, he is perhaps even better known for his theory on human nature. Confucius had urged the *junzu* to concentrate on developing their goodness and benevolence, ignoring the superficial attractions of profit or personal gain. In the century after his death, numerous theories of human nature had emerged, according to which humans were essentially good, bad, or neutral.



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Mencius is the second most important intellectual in the history of Confucianism.

- Mencius argued that all humans were inherently good at birth, but they were often corrupted by life experiences and, thus, developed bad tendencies. Undoubtedly, all humans were born with innate seeds of goodness, including the Confucian virtues.
- Further, every human had the potential at birth to be a great sage, and this should be the lifelong quest of all men,

women, and children. The only real difference between a sage and ordinary men is that the sage has put in the hard work of study and reflection necessary to develop his ethical and intellectual facilities.

- The argument that the primary virtues could be developed only through education and dedication helped maintain Confucianism as the most essentially humanistic, dignified, and optimistic of all China's ancient philosophies, and it is still at the core of Neo-Confucianism today.

Xunzi (312–221 B.C.E.)

- Xunzi was born about 20 years before the death of Mencius, and although his first 50 years are shrouded in mystery, his life also shared some similarities with the lives of Confucius and Mencius. Like both of them, he was born in northern China, and he was acknowledged as one of the greatest minds of his times. Also like his predecessors, Xunzi left behind a series of reflections that were put together in a book known as the *Xunzi*, although Xunzi may actually have written his own book!
- Despite these similarities, there is a significant difference between Xunzi and his predecessors: This philosopher was actually successful in attaining an influential political position and, thus, gained practical experience in statecraft that the others never had. This gave him a somewhat more jaundiced view of human nature, and his interpretation of the master's philosophy was at times so diametrically opposed to that of Mencius that it is difficult to see them as members of the same school.
- In the second half of his life, Xunzi moved to the powerful state of Qi, where he taught at the state-sponsored Jixia academy, the intellectual center of the Warring States Period. He was later slandered in the Qi court and forced to move to the southern state of Chu. In Chu, he was employed as the magistrate of the region of Lanling, in today's Shandong province.

- As a teacher, Xunzi is best known for his influence on two later Legalist philosophers and has sometimes been seen as a proto-Legalist himself. But Xunzi remained absolutely faithful to the Confucian ideals of ethical government, and he shared Mencius's optimism about the potential of all humans to improve themselves.
- Xunzi's experience in practical statecraft led him to advocate for the necessity of strong centralized government. But like Mencius, he also believed that rulers and governments existed to serve the good of the people, and if they failed in this, they could and should be deposed.
- Xunzi disagreed with Mencius that humans were born good, arguing instead that if left to their own devices, humans would descend into chaos and conflict. Still, he claimed that we can rectify the inherent flaws in human nature through the construction of culture and civil society. Like a good Confucianist, Xunzi argued that personal cultivation and formal education were the keys to this triumph over our animal instincts.
- Xunzi did not believe in life after death, and he thought that heaven (or nature) was completely oblivious to humans. He said that leaders should give up trying to interpret natural phenomena as somehow instructive: "Heaven pursues its course no matter who sits on the throne."
- Xunzi's Confucianism is clearly a product of its pessimistic times. Xunzi lived in a period of often-violent social and political change; thus, it was the destructive and negative aspects of human nature that seemed most real to him. But he never forgot the essential optimism of Confucianism: the idea that everyone can improve through education and self-reflection.

The Evolution of Confucian Philosophy

- Over the next centuries, the ideas and texts produced by these three great early Confucians had a profound impact on the evolution of Confucian philosophy. As Confucianism grew and proved itself

adaptable to dramatic changes in social, economic, and political culture, it became ever more deeply entrenched at the intellectual heart of Chinese and Eastern civilization.

- The fundamental optimism at the core of Confucianism explains why its adherents placed such a high value on education, politics, and direct intervention in public affairs. To that end, Confucians actively sought government positions in which they could use their education and skills to solve the political and social problems of their times.
- But for many of their contemporaries, this optimism was seen as a waste of time and energy. In the next two lectures, we will explore two radically different alternatives to this proactive Confucianist approach—Daoism and Legalism.

Suggested Reading

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 2.

Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Was Mencius naively optimistic in arguing that human nature was fundamentally good?
2. Was Xunzi too harsh in condemning human nature as fundamentally evil?

Great Ideas of the Zhou—Daoism

Lecture 9

At the heart of Confucianism was a sense of optimistic activism; Confucians placed a high value on education, politics, and direct intervention in public affairs, but not everyone agreed with the Confucians' approach. One group in particular, the Daoists, answered the problems facing their society in a completely different way. Rather than actively engaging with the cares of everyday life, they believed that the best action was to withdraw from them. Only through non-action, they argued, would real change occur. The philosophy of Daoism remains difficult for us to pin down, but it has been profoundly influential on Chinese and East Asian civilization and is universally recognized as the second great intellectual product of the Warring States era.

Romanization of Chinese Characters

- Although the issue of romanization of Chinese characters is not specifically related to Daoism, it is important to clear up possible confusion about such variant spellings as “Daoism” and “Taoism.”
- From the late 19th century until 1979, Chinese characters were romanized using a system developed by two 19th-century British academics and diplomats, Thomas Wade and Herbert Giles. The Wade-Giles system was widely used in almost all European-language textbooks for most of the 20th century.
- Following the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government announced that it wanted a new system of romanization. An alternative system called Pinyin was created and championed by a man called Zhou Youguang. The name “Pinyin” literally means “to spell the way it sounds.” In 1958, Pinyin was introduced into primary schools; it became China's official romanization system in 1979; and it was cemented into law in 2001.

- The main advantage of Pinyin is that, unlike the Wade-Giles system, it is highly intuitive. The spellings used to transliterate Chinese characters give much better clues about pronunciation than any of the earlier systems. Of course, the changing systems can be confusing for the poor student of Chinese history and culture!

Origins and Beliefs of Daoism

- For most of China's history, Confucianism has been the system of thought that has underpinned most intellectual, social, and political life. And because Confucianism was adopted by many other East and Southeast Asian states, it has remained the dominant ideology of Eastern civilization. But the optimistic and essentially rationalist ideas of Confucianism have never encompassed the entire spectrum of the Chinese collective psyche; there have always been alternatives, particularly Legalism and Daoism.
- Daoism runs counter to Confucian rationality; it mocks ritual and philosophical discussion; it urges individualism rather than the Confucian ideal of working collectively for the good of the state and society. The two philosophies are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they offer complementary views of life.
- It is difficult to determine how Daoism was actually understood during the late Zhou dynasty, that is, how it was articulated by its founders and understood by its adherents.
 - Some scholars believe that Daoism was always a quasi-religious movement based on meditation.
 - Others see it as an alternative political ideology that aimed at creating a unified, successful state through different methods than those of the Confucians.
 - Philosophers see Daoism as a genuine metaphysical philosophy that encourages its practitioners to discover the eternal reality that exists at the heart of the cosmos.

- The original meaning of Daoism is further clouded by the fact that no unifying authority was imposed on the ideology in the way that the great Confucian thinkers worked out a clear interpretation and agenda for Confucianism. Thus, the philosophical strand of Daoism differed from the religious strand, which in turn differed from more practical political notions of Daoism.
- Confucians tended to be highly critical of the religious version of Daoism, particularly that which involved fortune telling or magic. But Daoism nonetheless quickly became the principal form of daily religious expression in the lives of the Chinese people, and centuries later, it proved flexible enough to blend well with the imported ideology of Buddhism.
- Confucians' criticism of the religious aspects of Daoism highlights the serious differences between the two philosophies.
 - Where Confucianism focuses on the psychology of the individual human and the sociology of our culture and political structures, Daoism is principally concerned with the natural world.
 - As noted in a previous lecture, Confucianism is human centered. It is a system through which humans can learn to live in harmony with other humans. Daoism, in contrast, is nature centered, a system whereby humans can learn to live in harmony with the natural world and the cosmos.
 - This profound difference in focus is at the heart of the intellectual gulf between Confucianism and Daoism. Confucians were optimistic about humans' ability to live in harmony with one another and with nature. Daoists were essentially pessimistic about the ability of humans to construct harmonious, ordered societies, and these societies would essentially be at odds with nature. Thus, the Daoists feared government, law, and education, because these are artificial devices destructive to nature.

- Both philosophies emerged in the context of the chaotic later Zhou dynasty, but both also became universal ideologies that transcended their particular place and time. The main difference is that, where Confucianism focused on the preservation of culture and social order, Daoism rejected society and focused instead on the preservation of life itself in the context of the natural universe.

Laozi and the *Daodejing*

- Many fascinating legends surround Laozi, the purported author of the *Daodejing* (“*The Way and Its Power*”). If he existed, he would have lived in the 6th century B.C.E. It is perhaps more reasonable to assume, however, that various contributors to Daoism have gathered around the name of Laozi, who might have been both a historical and a semi-mythical figure.
- The *Daodejing* is a difficult and enigmatic text to read. Much of it is in poetical form, and some scholars speculate that it might have originally been conceived as a series of chants for meditation. The verse itself is often cryptic, ambiguous, and contradictory; thus, the *Daodejing* is open to a wide range of interpretations.
- The language of the *Daodejing* is also incredibly powerful, full of mysterious messages that have resonated with millions of readers. The first lines of the text immediately demonstrate its elusive power:

The *dao* that can be named is not the eternal *dao*.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.

- From this, we understand that it is impossible to name, codify, or quantify in any way the essence of the *dao* (“way”).
- These lines also make clear that it is not humans who are at the center of the cosmos but this great nameless force.
- The *Daodejing* goes on to suggest that anything we can name or categorize is inherently trivial. We should thus pursue that

which cannot be named, the invisible, indivisible, non-material force or energy that is the source of everything that has ever existed or will ever happen.

- Even more enigmatically, the *Daodejing* suggests that this original force of the cosmos, this eternal and unchanging principle, doesn't actually do anything. It is imagined as supremely passive and yielding and, therefore, essentially negative; it does nothing yet accomplishes everything.
- There are implications in this understanding for how to live one's life:

The sage experiences without abstraction
And accomplishes without action;
He accepts the ebb and flow of things,
Nurtures them, but does not own them,
And lives, but does not dwell.

- To truly live in harmony with the cosmos and with other humans in civil society demands that we retreat from engagement in the world of politics and society. It was human striving, ambition, and activism that had brought the world into the chaotic Warring States Period; the proper response was to cease striving and live as simply as possible.

Master Zhuang and the *Zhuangzi*

- Another great Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi*, takes its name from its semi-legendary author, Master Zhuang. Some scholars see him as a historical figure who lived between approximately 369 and 286 B.C.E., but others doubt that he ever actually existed. The text of the *Zhuangzi* does not appear to be the work of a single author; it is a compilation of essays, dialogues, parables, and descriptions of encounters with other famous philosophers.
- Two of the major themes explored in the *Zhuangzi* are the importance of maintaining one's perspective in life and the uncertainty of human knowledge.

Lines from the *Daodejing*:

“The named is the mother of ten thousand things” (meaning that we should give up naming—give up chasing the ten thousand things—and instead pursue that which cannot be named: the force at the heart of the universe).

“Being divine you will be at one with the dao. Being at one with the dao is eternal. And though the body dies, the dao will never pass away.”

“The softest thing in the universe overcomes the hardest thing in the universe. That without substance can enter where there is no space. Hence I know the value of non-action.”

- Only the *dao*, the force or the way at the heart of the universe, is absolute and unchanging. Everything else in the cosmos, including everything humans can ever know, must be considered relative to the *dao*.
- In order to be happy, we need to recognize this relativity of human concepts in relation to the absolute—we can only ever obtain relative happiness, relative truth, relative freedom.
- Once we recognize this fact, we will stop trying to achieve perfection and be happier.
- In the *Daodejing*, Laozi offers a formula to preserve and appreciate human life through intuition and non-action. The *Zhuangzi* goes further and attempts to articulate a vision of the place of humans in the cosmos that, once properly understood, will allow them to become reconciled to death.
 - In order to do this, the *Zhuangzi* questions the possibility of ever attaining absolute knowledge; this is beyond our grasp. The pointless striving toward knowledge is never more obvious than when we consider the question of death.

- We can never know whether life is better than death, the *Zhuangzi* argues, so why do we worry so much about our mortality?
- The chief virtue we should try to perfect is *wuwei*, a term that implies a disengagement from the affairs of the world. This notion had important implications for the structure of the state and society; essentially, the Daoists were arguing for less government. The *Daodejing* envisioned a world of tiny, self-sufficient communities where there was no desire to conquer or even trade with one's neighbors.
- By encouraging the development of a reflective and introspective consciousness, Daoism offered an intellectual, spiritual, and political alternative to Confucianism, but ultimately, neither philosophy could bring China out of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. While the Confucians studied and debated and the Daoists meditated and withdrew, the wars continued, and people suffered deprivation and death. It was the third great product of the era—the ideology of Legalism—that finally brought an end to 500 years of fragmentation and chaos. This philosophy will be the subject of our next lecture.

Suggested Reading

Fung Yulan (Bodde, trans.), *A History of Chinese Philosophy*.

Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. According to the Daoists, what is the goal of life?
2. What do Daoists mean by the statement: “Those who know do not speak. / Those who speak do not know”?

Great Ideas of the Zhou—Legalism

Lecture 10

As we've seen, the Warring States Period was a time of constant war, but the Qin dynasty brought an end to this period, unified China, and imposed a system of government and administration known as Legalism. The law codes of the Qin listed gory punishments imposed for various crimes and included a statement that no one who broke the law would be immune to these punishments, including the ruler. Neither Daoism nor Confucianism had been able to solve the problems of a bitterly divided late Zhou China, but under the philosophy of Legalism, the first unified Chinese Empire was established. In this lecture, we'll discuss the origins and architects of this pragmatic philosophy.

Climax of the Warring States Period

- Between 360 and 250 B.C.E., conflict between the mega-states intensified as the Warring States Period reached its violent climax. The major states of Qin, Wei, Zhao, Han, and Qi fought stupendous battles in which entire armies were destroyed, capital cities taken, and alliances forged and broken.
- An allied force of Han and Wei attacked the Qin in 298, and after three years of fighting, the Qin were forced to surrender the strategic Hangu Pass. Four years later, the Han/Wei partnership collapsed, and a new alliance between Qin and Qi saw the rulers of these states assume the titles of emperor of the west and emperor of the east.
- Most of the other states forged an alliance against the Qi, reducing the Qi state to just two cities. By 278 B.C.E., the two remaining great powers were Qin in the west and Zhao in the north and center. By 265, all diplomatic relations between Qin and Zhao had broken down, and war erupted between them.

- The two armies reached a stalemate that lasted for three years, but eventually, Zhao forces were surrounded. Near starvation, they surrendered in September 260 to the brutal Qin general Bai Qi, who annihilated the entire Zhao force. This battle alone may have cost the lives of 400,000 men!
- This was the political and military context in which the third influential body of thought in the later Zhou dynasty emerged—Legalism. Like Confucianism and Daoism, Legalism sought stability in an age of turmoil, but it focused on strengthening the power of the king and the state, rather than on creating a more harmonious society.
- Legalist philosophers and statesmen argued that only through strict laws and harsh punishments would it be possible to achieve an orderly society. They believed that humans were born evil and would act virtuously only if forced to do so by the state. In the end, these arguments prevailed, because it was Legalism that brought order back to China.

Emergence of the Concept of Law

- In Classical Chinese, the word for “law” is *fa*, which can be translated as “fair” or “just.” Some scholars argue that *fa* in its original usage was associated with notions of social justice rather than criminality, a quite different understanding from the rationale behind the origins of law in Western culture, which always had to do with taboo and the banning of certain behaviors.
- Another Chinese word—*xing*—emerged later to describe a system of laws and punishments. *Xing* originally referred specifically to the punishment of decapitation, but the concept evolved to describe the general system of laws, which included a punishment component. The punishments included tattooing on a criminal’s face, disfigurement, castration, mutilation, and execution.

- Not surprisingly, the Confucians rejected the very idea of *xing* and advocated instead for a system based not on formal law but on ethical, cooperative behavior as a way of achieving social cohesion.
 - The Confucians believed in the virtue of *li*, which they understood as a set of culturally and socially valued norms that would provide guidance to proper behavior. The norms of *li* would not be fixed but would change over time to reflect what society considered acceptable.
 - Opponents of Confucianism pointed out that in the absence of any systematic safeguard provided by codified laws, this loose interpretation of *li* would be subject to abuse.
- In the last centuries of the Warring States Period, a new group of scholars—the Legalists—began to articulate a different solution to the problems of social cohesion and acceptable behavior.
 - Legalists believed that humans were born evil; thus, the only way to achieve and maintain social order was to publicly promulgate clear laws that carried with them the threat of severe punishment.
 - The Legalists even borrowed from the Daoist concept of *wuwei*, or disengagement, by arguing that the system of laws should be run objectively by the state, not the ruler. In this way, the law would be impartial and no one would be above it.
- This experiment in achieving social order was initially tried out in the powerful Qin state, and because the Qin were eventually able to conquer their rivals and reunify China under their hegemony, the laws and system of Legalism became a major influence on subsequent Chinese and East Asian civilization.

Shang Yang (c. 390–338 B.C.E.) and Han Feizi (280–233 B.C.E.)

- Both Shang Yang and Han Feizi were political advisers in the court of the state of Qin in the early 4th and late 3rd centuries B.C.E., which gave them the opportunity to put their Legalistic ideas into practice.

- Shang Yang was chief minister of Qin between 361 and 338 B.C.E. He is credited by historians as being personally responsible for launching the Qin on a course toward wealth and military power. His ideas are found in a surviving text called *The Book of Lord Shang*, the first synthesized articulation of ideas that later came together under the title of Legalism.



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As chief minister of Qin, Shang Yang had the opportunity to put his Legalistic ideas into practice, and he launched the Qin on a course toward wealth and power.

- Legalists focused on the practical problems of organizing and maintaining an effective state through political control, rather than on the sort of ethical issues that concerned the Confucians or the concerns about nature that fascinated the Daoists.
- In direct opposition to Mencius (who frowned on notions of power, profit, and political control), *The Book of Lord Shang* embraces methods whereby rulers could increase their wealth and power, including through the use of slave or coerced labor and by war.
- Legalists returned to the ancient notion of *fa*, but for Lord Shang, this meant establishing clear rules and inescapable punishments for infractions. A strong state also needed strict regulations for bureaucrats and the bureaucracy, which the Legalists called *shu*. Finally, the application of *shih*, loosely defined as “force” or “power,” was the third element seen as necessary to the successful functioning of a state.

- A century after the death of Lord Shang, a young scholar named Han Feizi found employment in the relatively weak state of Han. He was destined to become the most famous and systematic of all the Legalist theorists.
 - Early in his career Han Feizi became a student of the great Confucian Xunzi. Like his mentor, Han Feizi believed that, left to their own devices, humans would always act in their own self-interest, rather than for the good of the state.
 - Rulers should thus abandon any illusions about humane and ethical systems of government and should distrust everyone around them, including ministers and members of their own families. Only the capable and the worthy should be placed in high government positions.
 - Over the millennia that have followed, history has judged Han Feizi harshly, condemning him as the architect of royal tyranny and harsh punishments. But more recent historians prefer to see him as a product of his historical time, as someone who genuinely wanted to see political order restored to China after 500 years of violence.
- The legacy of Legalism left to us by these two thinkers is a philosophy of statecraft very much focused on law and punishment—considered by some to be a doctrine of tyranny and by others to be the only hope for peace after centuries of war.
- Legalist principles of government have never been popular in East Asia, and very few Chinese thinkers have openly associated themselves with the Legalist school. Yet the practical principles of Legalism produced remarkable results in the state of Qin. By the 3rd century, Qin was, by all accounts, law abiding and well organized. In the final decade of the Warring States Period, the Qin crushed all their rivals and claimed absolute power over China.

Summing Up the Hundred Schools

- In the last four lectures, we have explored the later Zhou dynastic era, a 500-year period of disunity and conflict that led to the emergence of numerous philosophical schools, each of which attempted to address this great problem by creating more effective government and a more harmonious society.
- Of these philosophical schools, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism each offered clear alternatives about the proper role of the state, the relationship of individuals to government, and the structure of a harmonious society.
- The concept that emerged of what a well-ordered, well-ruled state should look like has defined the Chinese national character and, indeed, virtually all Eastern societies through to the present day.
- In future lectures, we will follow the continuing relevance of these ideas on the subsequent 2,000 years of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Southeast Asian history. And we will see the galvanizing impact these philosophies had on Western civilization when they were discovered by Jesuit missionaries to China and exported back to Europe during the Enlightenment.
- But it is also worth noting that a fundamental difference exists between these three Chinese philosophies and Western ideology. In essence, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism all promote a collectivist mindset in which the rights of the individual are to be subordinated to the rights of the state.
 - In other words, the necessity to create a harmonious, successful society is more important than the right of individuals to pursue their own self-interested destiny.
 - Is this notion fundamentally at odds with the American Declaration of Independence? Does this difference explain why, even today, the West continues to place so much importance on the notion of individual human rights, whereas many

people in East Asia value the success of the collective over that of the individual?

Suggested Reading

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 2.

Fung Yulan (Bodde, trans.), *A History of Chinese Philosophy*.

Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. What view do Legalists have about the essential nature of human beings?
2. Do we see elements of Legalism in modern-day states?

The Qin and the First Emperor of China

Lecture 11

Qin was one of the new states that emerged during the later Zhou dynasty, and by 260 B.C.E., it had become the most formidable. In the last decades of the Warring States Period, the Qin annihilated their rivals and emerged as the sole great power in China. Although this dynasty would last for only 15 years, it unified China under centralized control and established a model of government that became the template for all succeeding dynasties for the next 2,000 years. The rise of the Qin also marks the beginning of the great imperial age of Chinese history. We'll spend the next few lectures looking at this age, beginning with some of the extraordinary achievements of the Qin.

China's First Emperor

- During the decade of Qin military success between 230 and 221 B.C.E., the rival Yan state sent assassins to try to kill the Qin king, Ying Zheng. The king survived this and several other assassination attempts and, in 221, proclaimed himself Shihuangdi, meaning, in essence, "first august emperor."
- Having established his title and prestige, the first emperor undertook a stunning series of reforms in his 11-year reign, many of which went on to become foundational concepts of Eastern civilization.
- His first task was to amalgamate the divided states, regions, and peoples of China into some type of uniform entity. But first, he had to weaken the power of the feudal nobility; he did this by moving its leading members (perhaps as many as hundreds of thousands) to the Qin capital at Xianyang and then formally abolishing the ancient noble houses. In place of the Zhou feudal structure, China was divided into 36 commanderies, or provinces, each under the control of administrative bureaucracies rather than feudal lords.

- To guard against local rebellions, Shihuangdi ordered civilians to surrender all the weapons they had amassed after centuries of warfare. Private possession of arms was prohibited under the new Qin law codes. Indeed, the rigidly Legalist code was soon promulgated throughout the empire, and in line with the core beliefs of Legalist philosophy, it attempted to regulate all aspects of society.
- The emperor and his advisers did not tolerate criticism of the government. After Prime Minister Li Si complained that scholars were using past records and philosophical texts to criticize the government's policies, the emperor passed a law banning most manuals and "dangerous" books. This meant that all texts other than those written on the relatively innocuous subjects of divination, medicine, forestry, and farming were collected and burned.
- After introducing these reforms aimed at political amalgamation, Shihuangdi turned to language and commerce. The writing system was reformed, and all weights, currency, and measurements were standardized. The Qin also introduced reforms that allowed for private ownership of land by peasants.
- Shihuangdi then embarked on massive building projects that required huge drafts of conscripted labor. The most impressive of these projects resulted in the construction of two of the wonders of the world: the emperor's own tomb and the Great Wall of China.

The Great Wall

- The structure that later became the Great Wall of China originated during the Zhou dynasty as a stamped-earth military fortification built against intrusion by nomadic tribes along the northern borders.
 - During the Warring States Period in particular, the northern states of Qin, Wei, Qi, and Zhao had each built their own smaller walls, mainly for defense from the nomads but also from each other.

- But it was Shihuangdi who ordered that these small, local walls now be connected to form a single defensive system along the entire northern border of the new empire as a defense against the dangerous nomadic confederation of the Xiongnu.
- The connection of these walls was a massive undertaking! The first problem was to transport the huge quantities of materials that were required for construction. Wherever possible, the builders tried to use local resources, such as stone quarried locally in the mountains or earth in the northern plains.
- Unfortunately, no historical records have survived that indicate the exact length or course of the Qin dynasty walls. Nor is the exact human cost of the construction known, but estimates of the number of indentured peasant workers who died during the building of the wall range from hundreds of thousands to as many as a million!
- The Qin wall took about 10 years to finish, and it eventually stretched from Linzhao in the west (in the eastern part of today's Gansu province) to Liaodong in the east (in today's Jilin province). The wall not only served as a defense in the north, but it also symbolized the power of Shihuangdi, which may have been the real intention behind its construction.
- Subsequent dynasties kept repairing, rebuilding, and expanding sections of the Great Wall to defend themselves against aggressors. The present Great Wall near Beijing, those sections that most visitors to China see today, was mostly constructed during the Ming dynasty, which ruled from 1368 to 1644.
 - Under the Ming, bricks and granite were used in construction, and sophisticated designs and passes were built in the places of strategic importance.
 - The total length of the wall is around 8,850 kilometers, or 5,500 miles, making it one of the most extraordinary examples of monumental architecture in all of world history.

The Tomb of Shihuangdi

- Shihuangdi was obsessed with the possibility of attaining eternal life. To this end, he sent thousands of young Chinese men on an expedition to search for the legendary “islands of immortality.” He himself undertook several long journeys to the sacred Mount Tai, and he employed alchemists to concoct extraordinary potions that might be the secret elixir of youth. Ironically, his death in 210 B.C.E. was probably caused by drinking one of these potions, which apparently contained dangerously high quantities of mercury!
- The emperor was buried in a vast mausoleum just east of the modern city of Xian, in a tomb so extraordinary that it is often referred to today as the eighth wonder of the world! The tomb was lost to history for almost 2,000 years and was rediscovered by accident in 1974 by a group of local farmers who were digging wells.
- Excavations at the site are ongoing, and thus far, only a small part of the massive complex has been excavated. The complex measures about a third of a mile north to south and a little more than a quarter of a mile east to west.
- The mausoleum is divided into an east and west vault, surrounded by thick walls with guard towers. The west vault is largely unexcavated, but in the east vault, archaeologists discovered royal chariots with bronze horses and a terracotta army of thousands of life-sized soldiers.
 - Each soldier was built with solid legs and a hollow torso, and each was sculpted wearing the uniform and carrying the weapons of his particular branch of the military. There were infantry, cavalry, charioteers, standing and kneeling archers, and officers housed in their own headquarters building.
 - All the standing warriors were attached to clay plinths that rested on the tiled floor, which still resembles a modern paved surface today.



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The terracotta soldiers in the tomb of Shihuangdi were created with a series of mix-and-match clay molds, and each was then individualized by artists; no two are identical.

- The massive army was lined up in regular formation, ready to march out upon some otherworldly campaign, perhaps to protect and fight for the emperor in the afterlife.
- These sculptures represent a standard of art that, prior to the discovery of the tomb, experts had thought to be far beyond the capabilities of Qin dynasty craftsmen. The tomb, like the Great Wall, is at least the equal of any of the mausoleums, fortresses, or defensive walls constructed by other ancient civilizations, including the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.
- Many thousands of laborers were conscripted to work on the mausoleum, most of whom were worked to death. According to Sima Qian, the historian of the Han dynasty who wrote a little more than a century after the death of Shihuangdi, those workers who survived were killed and buried with the emperor to keep the location of the tomb a secret.

- Chinese archaeologists have been at work excavating the site over the past 35 years, and the central tomb containing the emperor has yet to be opened. Magnetic scans of the central tomb have revealed what appears to be a large number of coins, leading archaeologists to speculate that perhaps the royal treasury was also buried with the emperor.
- Sima Qian concludes his account by offering an astonishing description of the emperor's personal tomb. According to the historian, there is a huge central chamber topped by a ceiling studded with pearls and precious stones to represent the moon, sun, and stars. Sima Qian also warns us that armed and primed crossbows were set up as booby traps for anyone who dared to enter the first emperor's tomb!

Shihuangdi's Successors

- It appears to be one of the maxims of history that leaders with charisma, power, personality, and ability are often followed by successors who lack these same attributes. Such was certainly the case with the first dynasty of China.
- Upon the emperor's death in 210, a deadly power struggle broke out in the Qin court between the adviser Li Si and a powerful eunuch named Zhao Gao. In the end Zhao Gao prevailed, and Li Si was executed.
- Zhao Gao soon forced the emperor's oldest son and legitimate heir, known as Qin Er Shi, to commit suicide because of his incompetence. A nephew of Er Shi, Ziyang, then ascended to the throne as second emperor and immediately executed Zhao Gao.
- During his short reign, Ziyang faced increasing civil unrest, and several local officials declared themselves rival kings. Ziyang clung to his throne by declaring himself the one true king, but he was unable to deal with a large-scale popular revolt that broke out in 209 B.C.E. He was defeated by a rebel army near the Wei River

in 207 B.C.E. and, after surrendering, was promptly executed. The Qin capital was destroyed by the rebels in 206 B.C.E.

- The eventual victor in these struggles was Liu Bang, a man of lowly background who had been a minor local official for the Qin. In 206, he declared himself king of the Han state and then defeated his rival, the brilliant general Xiang Yu. Liu Bang changed his name to Emperor Gaozu and made a new capital at Changan close to the Qin court; the Han dynasty was born.

Suggested Reading

Bodde, *China's First Unifier*.

Schirokauer, et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider

1. How can we explain the extraordinary and rapid achievements of Qin Shihuangdi?
2. What ultimately was the purpose (and effectiveness) of the construction of the Great Walls?

Contact with the West—The Early Han

Lecture 12

The Han were able to build on the achievements of the first Qin emperor, Shihuangdi, to create one of the great empires in world history, the equivalent of what the Romans were able to achieve at the opposite end of Eurasia. The Han established what can be understood as a second stage in the history of the durable East Asian political structure begun by the Qin and would rule China for the next four centuries, from 206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E. In this lecture, we'll explore the Han dynasty through its political developments, cultural legacy, and technological achievements to better understand why its influence was so profound on the foundations of Eastern civilization.

Emergence of the Han Dynasty

- The Han dynasty began when Liu Bang emerged as the victor in the power struggle between rival rebel forces after the Qin dynasty fell. After defeating his rivals, Liu Bang (whose reign name was Emperor Gaozu) constructed a new capital at Changan and proclaimed the Han dynasty in 206 B.C.E.
- The Han presided over four centuries of political consolidation under strong central government with a well-organized and highly educated bureaucracy. Under the Han, China greatly expanded its territory, eventually stretching from Vietnam in the south to Korea in the north and from the China Sea in the east into the heart of Central Asia to the west.
- This dramatic expansion of the Chinese polity had major world-historical implications; under the Han, East Asia began to engage with the rest of Eurasia for the first time. By the 1st century C.E., all of Afro-Eurasia was connected through a network of trade routes and became the most dynamic region on the planet.

Political Developments of the Western Han

- During the first of the two periods of the Han, the dynasty was ruled from the western capital of Changan, located at the site of the modern Chinese city of Xian. Thus, the early Han dynasty is referred to as the Western Han. Later, the dynasty relocated its capital to the eastern city of Luoyang; for this reason, the later Han dynasty is known as the Eastern Han.
- The Western Han succeeded politically where the Qin had failed because they were more moderate in their approach to government. The Han reduced taxes on peasants and enlisted the support of Confucian scholars and Daoist philosophers, essentially replacing Qin Legalist terror by reviving intellectual life.
- The Han also created a large bureaucracy staffed by skilled, salaried administrators to rule the empire. During the first century of Han rule, the decision was made to employ men to staff this bureaucracy on the basis of an examination system that demanded a deep knowledge of Confucianist philosophy. This was a masterstroke because of the Confucian insistence on ethical behavior and loyalty to the state.
- Not that all these political innovations happened at once; they were introduced by different emperors during the first century of the dynasty. The state inherited by Liu Bang retained the administrative structure put in place by Shihuangdi, but the new emperor retreated somewhat from the Qin experiment in strong centralized rule by establishing vassal principalities in some areas.
 - Actually, Liu Bang had little choice in this; immediately after proclaiming the Han dynasty, he was essentially forced to divide the country into several quasi-feudal states to satisfy some of his wartime allies.
 - Conscious of the ambition of the nobility and the potential for the country to slip back into a Warring States mentality, as his reign progressed, Liu Bang attempted to regain control of much of the land he had “given away” by reincorporating it into the empire.

- But Liu Bang retained a much more decentralized administrative structure than the Qin had done, and this proved a constant source of trouble throughout his reign as ambitious nobles and Liu family members competed with one another to gain power.
- Liu Bang's successors introduced a provincial form of administration in which the country was divided into commanderies (which were then further subdivided) and kingdoms. This administrative structure was by far the most sophisticated and well organized in world history to that point.

The “Triumph of Confucianism”

- After the death of Liu Bang, his successors tried to rule this complex state by combining Legalist methods with Daoist principles. But during the reign of Emperor Wudi (r. 140–86 B.C.E.), the Han government adopted Confucianism as the official philosophy of the state. Many scholars describe this policy shift as the “triumph of Confucianism.”
- Confucian scholars deserve credit for this triumph in that they were able to adapt this flexible philosophy to the specific mood and need of the times. The Confucian cosmology that emerged at this time legitimized the Han dynasty and elevated the status of the emperor as the only person capable of linking heaven, earth, and humanity into a harmonious whole.
- Actually, we can see elements of both Daoism and Confucianism in the concept of the power and role of the emperor that emerged, particularly through the work of philosopher Dong Zhongshu (179–104 B.C.E.).
 - The Daoist influence emerged in the argument that the ruler ruled best through non-action, by removing himself from the tedious matters of everyday government.
 - The Confucian influence was more moral, arguing that a ruler who did not do his job properly would disturb the balance

between heaven and earth, thus opening up the state to a range of natural disasters.

- Evidence suggests that most Han emperors genuinely supported the Confucian ideal that the highest officials of the state should be men of intellectual and ethical ability, rather than those of noble birth.
 - A government edict from as early as 196 B.C.E. demanded that provincial and local officials seek out men of promise in their districts and send them to the capital, where they would be subjected to some type of examination.
 - The official adoption of Confucianism by Emperor Wudi 60 years later enhanced this civil service nomination system and strengthened the examination by basing it squarely on the knowledge candidates possessed of the Confucian classics.
 - Candidates for high office needed to have had considerable training as scholars before they could take up administrative positions, and these Confucian scholar-bureaucrats now gained prominent status as the new elite.
 - These scholars criticized government policy if they believed it was warranted and were fierce watchdogs against unnecessary expenditure and imperial extravagance. They were particularly active in resisting the increasing power of the eunuchs.
- The result of this coupling of Confucianism with Chinese bureaucracy was a sort of balance of power between the inner court of the emperor (including his family and eunuchs) and the outer court of the Confucian-trained and highly educated bureaucracy. It's important to note, however, that in the real world of politics and government, emperors still combined Legalist methods with increasingly orthodox Confucian ideals.

Expansion of the Han

- Late in the 2nd century B.C.E., Wudi instigated a period of aggressive imperial expansion. Han armies advanced northeast

toward Korea, west as far as Dunhuang, and south into Vietnam. Once the military garrisons were in place, merchants and settlers moved into the newly opened regions in large numbers.

- To finance these imperial expansion campaigns, Wudi was forced to find new sources of revenue, including minting coins, confiscating some land from nobles, selling titles and high offices, and increasing taxes on business activity. The government also decided to monopolize the highly profitable salt and iron industries.
- These expansionist policies eventually led to fiscal crisis and peasant unrest and, ultimately, to the end of the early Han dynasty.

The End of the Han

- In what seems to be a standard pattern in East Asian history, the powerful Emperor Wudi was followed by a succession of weaker emperors, and as fiscal problems continued to mount, the government was eventually overthrown in the year 9 C.E. by a Confucian chief minister named Wang Mang.
- As Wang Mang saw the problem, the peasants were struggling to pay their taxes and were finding themselves increasingly enslaved through debt, but at the same time, the number of tax-free noble estates was increasing.
 - In an attempt to redress this situation, Wang Mang seized power from the Han government. He abolished debt slavery and attempted to portion the land out to peasants through a “well-field” system.
 - He also tried to stabilize the prices of basic commodities by establishing government agencies to buy and stockpile surplus commodities when prices were low and sell them at a subsidized rate when scarcity forced prices to rise.
 - But Wang Mang’s reformist program eventually failed because his policies were resented by powerful landlords.

- Liu Xiu, a descendant of Liu Bang, assembled a force of rebellious peasants and attacked Wang Mang in the capital of Changan. Wang Mang and his followers made a valiant stand, but he was killed in battle in 23 C.E.
- Two years later, in 25 C.E., Liu Xiu (whose reign name was Guangwudi) declared the later Han dynasty, which went on to rule for almost another two centuries, until 220 C.E. Liu Xiu reestablished the dynasty in the eastern capital at Luoyang.



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- **Liu Xiu (reign name: Guangwudi) reestablished the Han, but with a later series of young emperors, the dynasty suffered corruption and infighting.**
- Guangwudi, his son Emperor Ming, and his grandson Emperor Zhang are generally considered to have been able emperors. But after the reign of Hedi (r. 89–105 C.E.), the next 10 emperors were very young. With this series of child rulers, the dynasty suffered from corruption and political infighting among three groups of powerful individuals: palace eunuchs, clans of the empresses, and the Confucian scholar-bureaucrats.
- Then, in 153 C.E., China was beset with a series of natural calamities, including massive locust swarms and devastating floods along the Huang He. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced off the land and took to the roads in a desperate search for food, but the government could do little to help them.

- Confucian students were so disgusted by the conniving and increasing corruption in court that they organized mass protests against the court eunuchs. The eunuchs responded by imprisoning Confucian officials and orchestrating purges of the outer court.
- By the late 2nd century, Daoist ideals of equal rights and equal land distribution had spread throughout the peasantry. The peasant insurgents of the Yellow Turban Rebellion swarmed across the north China plain, the principal agricultural sector of the country. In 184, a massive rebellion led by radical Daoists led to widespread attacks on government officials.
- The power once held by the Liu royalty now fell into the hands of local governors and warlords, three of whom eventually succeeded in taking control of most of China. The figurehead emperor Xian managed to hold on until 220, when he was forced to abdicate, bringing the Han dynasty to an end.

Suggested Reading

Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China*.

Tanner, *China: A History*, part 1, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the early Han emperors use a mix of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist philosophy to construct stable government?
2. Why were the later Han emperors unable to reclaim the strength and power of the early Han?

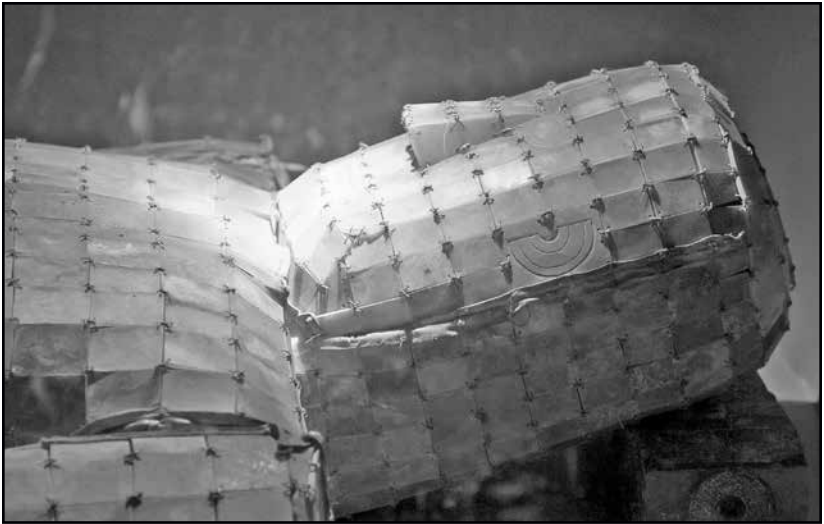
Triumph and Tragedy—The Later Han

Lecture 13

Many scholars over the centuries have criticized Han scholarship as lacking in originality, as being too focused on reinterpreting the more impressive cultural achievements of the Zhou dynasty, but such criticism seems unjustified. The Han government chose to revive Confucianism as its orthodox ideology, a decision that was inevitably accompanied by a revival of interest in the literary classics of the Zhou. Further, the Han took steps to ensure the survival of the Five Classics of Chinese literature. But as we'll see in this lecture, although the texts might have remained the same, the practical application of Confucianism proved remarkably adaptable to the new political reality of the Han.

Han Contributions to Education and Literature

- As we saw in an earlier lecture, Shihuangdi and his advisers had destroyed all books that might contain some ideological justification for criticism of the government. After the success of the Han, any pre-Han texts that had survived the Qin burning became greatly valued, even revered.
 - In particular, to ensure the survival of the Five Classics (the *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Odes*, *Book of Rites*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*), in 175 B.C.E., the Han government had each of the texts carved in stone.
 - Fifty years later, those stone slabs were erected in the new imperial institute, the pinnacle of the new state educational system, which was based almost exclusively on mastery of the Confucian classics.
- Another innovative result of the dynasty's focus on education and literature was the creation by the Han of what has often been described as the world's first dictionary, the *Shuowen jiezi*, which literally translates as “explaining simple and analyzing compound



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Archaeologists are uncertain whether jade suits were reserved for the burials of elites or whether they were common during the wealthy Han dynasty.

characters.” The compilation was completed by the Confucian scholar Xu Shen around 100 C.E.

Han Contributions to Visual Art

- Han visual art has also been criticized as unoriginal and built on the achievements of earlier, more innovative periods, but in fact, Han artists and craftsmen were highly creative. We see this creativity demonstrated in their superb pottery, engraved bronze mirrors, and magnificent jade burial suits.
- There are many superb examples of magnificently glazed Han dynasty pottery in the museums of the world today, particularly the beautiful miniature ceramic models (spirit models) of watchtowers, houses, and farmyards, complete with tiny human and animal figures. Scholars interpret the production of these models as a reflection of changes in thinking about the afterlife, a new belief that somehow these everyday activities would continue after death.

- It was also under the Han that a special type of bronze mirror emerged, highly polished on one side to provide a reflective surface and beautifully engraved on the other. Most enigmatic are the so-called TLV mirrors, which feature various dragon motifs and the letters (or shapes corresponding to) T, L, and V engraved on them. Scholars are uncertain of the meaning of these fantastic engraved figures or of the purpose of the TLV symbols.
- Han art is also justly famous for the creation of magnificent jade burial suits, often used for members of the royal family. Some of the suits discovered by archaeologists consisted of close to 2,500 individual squares of solid jade, joined by two and a half pounds of gold wire.

Sima Qian (145–90 B.C.E.)

- Sima Qian is recognized as the father of history writing in East Asia. He lived during the reign of Emperor Wudi and inherited from his father, Sima Tan, the position of grand historian to the emperor. He also took over from his father the ambitious task of writing the first complete narrative history of China, known today as the *Shiji*, or the “*Records of the Grand Historian of China*.”
- All previous Chinese dynastic histories had simply been collections of official records, recorded daily by scribes and used to compile a survey of a particular reign. These were impersonal chronicles, and before Sima Qian, it was regarded as highly improper for a historian to put forward a particular interpretive view or analysis of events. But Sima Qian valued his independence as a historian and was not afraid to criticize poor decisions made by recent emperors.
- Because of this independence of spirit, Sima Qian suffered personally and terribly at the hands of Wudi.
 - After a failed military expedition against the Xiongnu in 99 B.C.E., the Han general Li Ling was captured by the Xiongnu. The emperor was furious with Li Ling, and all the court officials tried to appease Wudi by openly condemning the failed general and recommending his execution.

- The only individual to speak up in support of Li Ling was his friend Sima Qian, who respected the general as an honest official who had been sent on a poorly considered campaign without the necessary logistical support from the emperor.
- Wudi became so angry with Sima Qian that he gave the historian the appalling choice of castration or death by suicide. Sima Qian chose to be castrated, but he then lived with the shame of not having taken the honorable path of suicide.
- In the *Shiji*, the historian produced the first great history of the peoples of China, from the pre-dynastic era through the early dynasties of the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin and concluding with an account of the great dynasty of his own time, the Han.
- Sima Qian introduced numerous historiographical innovations in his monumental work, such as the idea that a single historical event can have different meanings in different contexts and that individuals can have multiple intentions for their actions.

Han Innovations in Technology and Science

- Among the numerous technological innovations for which the Han were responsible are the following: the world's first padded horse collar, the world's first wheelbarrow, the first water mill, a type of seismograph, an accurate calendar, the piston bellows to assist in the manufacture of high-quality iron, and paper. We'll focus on just two of these innovations, the Han iron industry and the invention of paper.
- Iron making started much later in China than in many other parts of Eurasia, yet in less than three centuries, the Chinese advanced from their first tentative experiments with smelted iron to a position of undisputed Eurasian leadership.
 - Around 500 B.C.E., driven no doubt by the intensely competitive environment of the Warring States era, iron smelters in the southern kingdom of Wu developed a technique that would not be seen in Europe for another half millennium.

- Using sophisticated bellows and high-quality coal, the smelters of Wu achieved a temperature close to 1130° C, hot enough to be considered the equivalent of a blast furnace today. At this temperature and when combined with a small amount of carbon, iron essentially liquefied, which meant that it could be poured and cast into molds.
- This was a much less laborious method than the individual forging of each piece of iron, which remained the standard practice throughout the rest of Eurasia until well into medieval times.
- To increase its revenues, the Han government monopolized the production of iron, building around 50 huge blast furnaces, each of which could produce several tons of iron every day.
- Perhaps the most remarkable invention that appeared during the Han dynasty was the first paper in world history, made of a composite of natural fibers, such as hemp and bark, with textile fibers, such as silk.
 - For 2,000 years, the Chinese have attributed the invention of paper to an otherwise obscure court eunuch of the later Han dynasty named Cai Lun. Although Western scholars have often dismissed him as a legendary figure, there is plenty of documentary evidence not only that Cai Lun existed, but that he greatly pleased the emperor when he presented him with his invention of paper in 105 C.E.
 - The invention can be seen as yet another example of necessity driving innovation. As the bureaucracy reached the height of its size and sophistication in the later Han, so the volume of official records grew staggeringly large. We read that transporting even a small number of official documents transcribed on traditional bamboo strips would require the use of a wheelbarrow; thus, the invention of paper must have come as a relief to the court and the bureaucrats! By the 3rd century, paper was in common use in China.

- The historian Michael Hart argues that the invention of paper allowed Chinese civilization to surge ahead of the West throughout the 1st millennium of the Common Era. Knowledge was more rapidly disseminated, literacy became more widespread, and government bureaucracy was run much more efficiently because of the invention of paper. Only in the late Middle Ages would the West begin to close the knowledge gap on the East.

Ban Zhao (45–116 C.E.)

- Ban Zhao was the first female court historian in China, the position that Sima Qian and his father had occupied during the early Han dynasty. She came from a distinguished family of scholars and soldiers, and she inherited the position of court historian from her brother in 92 C.E.
- Ban Zhao's most famous work was *Lessons for Women*, a short book that outlines the proper behavior expected of good Confucian women. Some interpreters have argued that the book supports the subjugation of women by men; others, that it is a useful guide to teach women of the court how to avoid scandal and survive long enough to achieve venerable dowager status; yet others, that it is a subtle plea to the emperor for equal access to education for women.
- Ban Zhao focuses on the essential qualities and duties of a woman in a series of admonitions. She argues that successful women need four specific qualifications: womanly virtue, womanly words, womanly appearance, and womanly work. These ideas would profoundly influence women in China, Japan, and Korea for the next 2,000 years; many would argue that they still resonate powerfully in East Asian society today.
- But Ban Zhao's message remains enigmatic. She seems to accept that men are superior and that women should know their place and perform their duties in a subservient manner. Yet she also slips in a powerful argument to the emperor in favor of equal educational

opportunities for boys and girls: The ideals of “right living” and yin-yang harmony can be passed down through the generations only by education.

Engagement with Eurasia

- It was also during the Han dynasty that China and East Asia began to engage with the rest of Eurasia for the first time. As the Silk Roads spread across Central Asia, the Han found themselves part of a vast trade and exchange network that encompassed much of Afro-Eurasia.
- These connections were destined to have profound consequences for world history. This first great “Silk Roads era” will be our focus for the next five lectures.

Suggested Reading

Hinch, *Women in Early Imperial China*.

Watson, *Ssu-Ma Ch'ien*.

———, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Like that of the Romans, Han dynasty literature and art has sometimes been criticized for being unoriginal. How justified is this claim?
2. According to Ban Zhao, what was the proper role of women in Han China; was it essentially inferior to men or just different?

Silk Roads—In the Footsteps of Nomads

Lecture 14

The Silk Roads comprised one of the greatest trade routes of the ancient world, linking all of Afro-Eurasia into a single interconnected system of exchanges. Though silk was the major trade item from China, what made the Silk Roads extraordinary was the exchange of ideas they enabled. The Silk Roads can be seen as the forerunner of the globalized “village” in which we live today, the moment when the mingling of diverse peoples set human history on the path toward modernity. In this first lecture on the Silk Roads, we’ll discuss their significance to world history, look at the pastoral nomads who made these exchanges possible, and zoom in on two specific nomadic confederations, the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi.

The Silk Roads and “Big History”

- Big historians take the view that human history is characterized by a small number of episodes of extraordinary cultural change.
 - One such episode, for example, is the invention by humans of complex technologies and survival strategies—probably including symbolic language—that first occurred some 50,000 years ago in response to the last ice age.
 - A second revolution in human history was the appearance of agriculture from 11,000 years ago as a direct result of the waning of the ice age. Humans began to settle down with domesticated animals and plants, radically altering our fundamental way of life.
 - This led eventually to a third cultural revolution, the appearance of the first cities and states some 5,000 years ago.
 - Such episodes of profound technological and lifestyle changes fundamentally separate human history from the history of all other life on earth.

- Big historians also look for the major causes of cultural revolutions, particularly the roles of climate change and population pressure. But every region in which these changes first took place was also characterized by high levels of intercultural exchange; thus, contacts between different groups have also been an important driver in instigating large-scale change. Further, the more diverse the participants in these contacts, the more profound the change has been.
- The most significant exchange network of the premodern world was the Silk Roads, along which unparalleled levels of diverse intercultural communication occurred. They not only helped transform Eastern civilization but also radically affected the future course of world civilization. As we unfold the story of the Silk Roads, then, we also explore one of the great cultural revolutionary “moments” in the history of humanity.
- Although the Silk Roads functioned as migration and exchange routes for perhaps hundreds of thousands of years, we will focus on a much shorter period, from roughly 200 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. During this 500-year period, cultural exchange took place on an unprecedented scale among all the key players of Eurasia: the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans; Indians, Kushans, and Iranians; and Greeks, Romans, and Celts.
- Large-scale trade and exchange became possible at this moment in history only because of the appearance of great agrarian civilizations, such as those of the Han, Kushans, Parthians, and Romans. These powerful states established law and order over enormous areas of Afro-Eurasia, engendered political and military stability, minted and used coinage, and constructed sophisticated roads and maritime infrastructure.
- Although we often study these civilizations as though they existed in isolation, we should remember that for most of human history, states and civilizations were not separated from one another. Civilizations engaged in trade, fought wars, and exchanged ideas and diseases.

- It's also true that until the 1st century B.C.E., one key civilizational player was missing in these Eurasian interactions, and that was China and the other regions of East Asia, sealed off by formidable geographical barriers. That changed, however, with the advent of the Silk Roads.
- Once China and, indirectly, Korea and Japan became involved, material and nonmaterial exchanges ratcheted up to unprecedented levels. Before long, an enormous range of physical, intellectual, and biological “goods” was being synthesized and disseminated throughout Afro-Eurasia, completely transforming the world.

Pastoral Nomads

- For the vast majority of the 200,000 years or so that humans have been on earth, we survived as foragers, living off the fruits of the land and, eventually, learning to hunt animals for their meat and hides.
 - From about 7,000 years ago, however, some communities living in the grasslands of Eurasia learned more efficient ways of using certain types of animals than just killing them.
 - These communities were part of what has been dubbed the secondary products revolution, when humans learned to use the “secondary products” of animals while they are alive—their wool, milk, and blood; their traction power to haul carts and plows; and their mobility as a means of rapid transportation.
 - This discovery led directly to the emergence of a new lifeway for humans, pastoralism, or nomadic livestock herding. This lifeway is a hybrid, somewhere between nomadic hunting and gathering and sedentary farming.
- Pastoralists are essentially nomadic, and it was this mobility that was important to the establishment of the Silk Roads. Because pastoralists were now able to take their food, clothing, tools, and dwelling materials with them as they migrated across the landscape,

they moved into and “colonized” the steppe and desert regions of Africa and Eurasia. They moved between the border regions of the agrarian civilizations, linking them together in a single system of exchange.

The Xiongnu

- Two pastoral nomadic confederations, the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi, were particularly important to the story of the first Silk Roads era. Both groups were neighbors of ancient China.
- The Xiongnu controlled the steppe lands to the north of the Yellow River. According to Sima Qian, they moved with herds of horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and camels in migrations ranging from short excursions among hilly pastures to longer trips into the Gobi. In battle, the mounted Xiongnu archers used composite bows that could fire arrows with sufficient force to penetrate armour; they were also adept with swords and spears.
- Archaeological evidence, however, shows us that the Xiongnu were not always nomadic. Sites in Mongolia display evidence of farming



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The critical group of Eurasian people who made the Silk Roads possible was the pastoral nomads, the unsung heroes of world history.

activity, fixed dwellings and fortified settlements, and advanced craftsmanship. These discoveries have altered our previous impression of the lifeway of pastoral nomads in general, who must have followed a more sedentary lifeway than that described in ancient histories.

- The Xiongnu reached the peak of their power during the reign of their most feared leader, the *shanyu* Modu (r. 209–174 B.C.E.). Under Modu, the Xiongnu became a potent and dangerous force, numbering perhaps as many as 300,000 archer-warriors.
- Modu's rise to power is a compelling story that begins with an attempt by his father, Touman, to get rid of his oldest son in order to promote as his successor a younger son from a more favored consort.
 - To do this, Touman first sent Modu as a hostage to the Yuezhi people, the Xiongnu's rivals. After Modu had been accepted as hostage by the Yuezhi, Touman suddenly attacked them, knowing that the Yuezhi would kill his son in retaliation.
 - But the courageous and resourceful Modu managed to steal one of the Yuezhi's best horses and escape. His father was so struck by his bravery that he put Modu in command of a force of 10,000 cavalry!
 - After this incident, however, Modu was relentless in his attempt to kill and replace his father. He accomplished this on a hunting expedition, then executed his stepmother, younger brother, and the high officials who refused to take orders from him.
- During 35 years of brilliant rule, Modu extended Xiongnu power far beyond its traditional heartland, conquering his pastoral neighbors and incorporating them into the confederation before turning to confront the Han dynasty.

The Yuezhi

- The most powerful of all the nomadic neighbors of the Xiongnu was the rival confederation of the Yuezhi. Their ancestors were pastoralists who had migrated long distances across inner Asia during the Bronze Age, probably all the way from the Caucasus in southern Russia to the western border of ancient China. There, they dwelt for many centuries, growing wealthy and powerful. The principal settlement of the Yuezhi was in the Gansu Corridor, where melting snows from the high mountains sustained numerous oasis settlements.
- We learn from Sima Qian that the Yuezhi had a force of 100,000 trained mounted archers, and before the rise of Shanyu Modu, they treated the Xiongnu with disdain.
 - This enormous Yuezhi force of horseback archers was made up of contingents from subordinate groups that probably followed a range of lifestyles, from farmers to full-time nomads.
 - In fact, when we use such names as “Xiongnu” or “Yuezhi,” we are really referring to the ruling clan that gave its name to these stable confederations of different tribes, which would have varied substantially in their cultural practices and even their languages.
- Before the rise of Modu, the Yuezhi were justified in their dismissive attitude toward the Xiongnu, but from the moment the great *shanyu* appeared, the Yuezhi were in trouble. As Modu began to authorize or lead vicious raids on the Yuezhi, he also launched attacks against the Chinese Han.
- During the early decades of the Han dynasty, the emperors adopted a strategy of negotiating peace treaties with Modu and his successors, who accepted valuable Chinese tributes (including beautiful Han princesses), while still sending disdainful letters to the emperors demanding even more. Through such letters, the Han court heard of the devastating attacks on the Yuezhi that culminated in a final disastrous defeat.

- During the ultimate rout of the Yuezhi, around the year 162 B.C.E., the king's skull was turned into a drinking cup for the *shanyu*, and the Yuezhi confederation was left with no alternative other than to migrate far away from their homeland.
- The Yuezhi initially traveled a few hundred miles north into the fertile Ili River valley. For the next three decades, the Yuezhi occupied the valley, some groups pursuing farming and others pursuing pastoralism, while the ruling dynasty extracted tribute from other sedentary farmers in the region.
- Sometime around 133 B.C.E., a powerful contingent of Xiongnu and allied horsemen suddenly appeared, routing the Yuezhi and forcing them to resume their migration. This time, their journey took them thousands of miles west, deep into the heart of Central Asia. Around 130 B.C.E., they finally settled in the fertile river valleys that drained into the Amu Darya, a river that forms the northern border of Afghanistan.
- When the Yuezhi arrived, they defeated and evicted a powerful group of resident Scythians. This victory gave them control of the fabled kingdom of Bactria, and in the coming years, the Yuezhi consolidated their position in the region. This was the situation that an extraordinary young Chinese ambassador named Zhang Qian discovered when he turned up in Bactria a couple of years later; we will turn to Zhang Qian in the next lecture.

Suggested Reading

Benjamin. *The Yuezhi*.

di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*.

Jagchid and Symons, *Peace, War and Trade along the Great Wall*.

Questions to Consider

1. What, ultimately, is the fundamental significance of the Silk Roads to Eastern civilization and to world history?
2. Given the extraordinary significance of militarized pastoral nomads to human history, why are they so often neglected?

Silk Roads—The Envoy Zhang Qian

Lecture 15

In the last lecture, we introduced the Silk Roads and discussed the critical role pastoral nomads played in creating these trade routes, focusing particularly on the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi. We left the Yuezhi sometime around 130 B.C.E., dwelling in a strongly fortified position north of the Amu Darya and in control of Bactria. This was the situation a Chinese ambassador named Zhang Qian found when he appeared in Bactria a couple of years later. In this lecture, we'll look at how Zhang Qian, this courageous Chinese envoy who left China at the head of an expedition of only 100 men, led the way to developing the Silk Roads and, through remarkable perseverance, changed the course of world history.

The Expedition of Zhang Qian

- Zhang Qian was sent by the first Han emperor, Wudi, to follow the migrating Yuezhi in the hope of convincing them to return to China and join the Han in an alliance against their common enemy, the Xiongnu.
- In the course of the expedition, Zhang Qian breached both the formidable geographical barriers of western China and the military barrier established by the Xiongnu. He crossed thousands of miles of deserts, steppes, and mountain ranges, visiting places no Chinese individual had ever seen or heard of before.
- When Zhang Qian finally returned to the Han court and presented his report to Emperor Wudi, the Chinese became aware for the first time in their history of the world beyond their western borders. As a result of this expedition, the Silk Roads began to flourish, enticing China out of millennia of cultural and geographic isolation and into active engagement with the rest of Eurasia, including the Greco-Roman world.

Importance of the Expedition

- After the reign of Shanyu Modu, the Xiongnu were powerful enough to control a vast steppe empire that functioned as an intelligence barrier between China and the rest of Eurasia.
 - Thus, one of the motives of this mission called by the emperor Wudi must have been to simply obtain information about the world beyond the western regions and the Xiongnu Empire.
 - At the same time, Wudi may also have hoped to forge an alliance with the Yuezhi against their common Xiongnu foes.
- Both these motives required the recruitment of an envoy who would attempt to pierce the Xiongnu barriers and pursue the migrating Yuezhi. In 139 B.C.E., the young emperor Wudi moved to put his plan for an expedition into action.
- The Han sources provide limited biographical information on the early career of Zhang Qian, who appears to have been an obscure member of the lower nobility. According to Sima Qian, Wudi sent out a summons for men capable of undertaking a mission to follow the Yuezhi. Zhang Qian, an otherwise undistinguished palace attendant, answered the summons and was ultimately appointed by Wudi as “envoy to the Yuezhi.”

Zhang Qian's Journey

- We have two sources for the events of Zhang Qian's journey: the historians Sima Qian and Ban Gu.
- The expedition departed the Han capital of Changan probably in 138 B.C.E. and headed west through the Gansu Corridor and into the Gobi Desert, regions firmly under the control of the Xiongnu. Almost immediately, Zhang Qian and his party were captured by Xiongnu forces. Most of the men were killed, and Zhang Qian and his closest retinue were transported far to the north of the Gobi Desert, to the headquarters of the *shanyu*.



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Hearing the report of Zhang Qian to Emperor Wudi led the Chinese to recognize the trade and strategic opportunities that would become available through expansion of their interests into central Asia.

- The *shanyu* detained Zhang Qian for more than 10 years, giving him a wife with whom the explorer had children. But Zhang Qian eventually found an opportunity to escape with his handful of followers (including his wife and children) and set off in the direction of the Yuezhi.
- For the next months, he sped westward, passing through the Gobi Desert and into a region the Han sources called Dayuan, which is the rich Ferghana Valley of modern Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. By the time Zhang Qian arrived in Ferghana, the Yuezhi had already passed through, continuing their migration further west after their eviction from the Ili Valley.
- According to Zhang Qian's later report to Wudi, the people of Dayuan had heard of the wealth and power of the Han. On being presented to the king, Zhang Qian explained his mission and promised the king rich rewards from the Han if he would help the expedition on its way. The king happily provided guides to Zhang Qian.

- In Dayuan, Zhang Qian noticed herds of extraordinary horses grazing on the rich grasslands of the region. These horses had short legs, powerful chests, and barrel-shaped bodies, and they appeared to sweat blood.
 - Modern scientists have proposed two different ideas about these ancient “blood-sweating” horses of Ferghana: that small blood vessels burst between their ribs as they galloped or that a parasitic nematode burrowed into the subcutaneous tissues of the horses.
 - Wudi became enthralled with horses, which he called the “heavenly horses of Dayuan.” In 104 B.C.E., the emperor sent an army of 40,000 men on a campaign to Ferghana, with the aim of acquiring some of the horses. The first army was defeated, but Wudi sent 60,000 men the following year, under the command of General Li Guang. After another epic campaign, the general managed to acquire 3,000 horses, although only 1,000 survived the journey back to China.
- With the help of the guides provided by the king of Dayuan, the Han envoy was led to the neighboring state of Kangju, identified with the region known as Sogdia to Western authors, in Uzbekistan today.
- Despite their military strength, the Sogdians had wisely adopted a conciliatory position toward both the Xiongnu, who controlled the steppes to their north and east, and the Yuezhi, who were now in control of Bactria to the south. The Sogdians assisted Zhang Qian’s passage through their country and led him to the stronghold of the Yuezhi in the south.

The Court of the Yuezhi

- Zhang Qian probably arrived at the court of the Yuezhi ruling dynasty in 128 B.C.E., a full 10 years after he had set out from Changan. Once there, he learned that the ruler of the Yuezhi had no interest in entering an alliance with the Han, let alone confronting the Xiongnu. Having settled in a wealthy and fertile region and established hegemony over the entire Bactrian state, the Yuezhi

ruler had set his mind on a life of ease and had given up all thoughts of exacting revenge on the Xiongnu.

- Undaunted, Zhang Qian decided to remain in the region for about a year and accumulate as much information as he could about Bactria and other nearby regions, thus fulfilling the “intelligence-gathering” component of his mission. The information he collected and the reports he compiled are of incredible importance to East Asian and, indeed, world history.
 - Zhang Qian described Bactria (ancient Afghanistan) as a large state with a population of some 1 million or more, both farmers and urban dwellers. In the great market in the capital city of Bactra, he was astonished to find goods from southern regions of China, including bamboo canes and cloth that the merchants had purchased in India.
 - Zhang Qian sought more information on India, which the Chinese called Shendu. He was informed that the kingdom was hot and damp, that it was located along a great river, and that the soldiers rode elephants into battle. The Han envoy also learned about the powerful Iranian empire of the Parthians to the west.
- After his year-long intelligence-gathering sojourn in Bactria, Zhang Qian returned to the Yuezhi court to make one last attempt to forge an alliance. But as Sima Qian tells us, “In the end, Zhang Qian was never able to interest the Yuezhi in his proposals.”

Return to China

- Wisely, given the experiences of his outbound journey, Zhang Qian decided to return to Changan by a more southerly route, hoping to avoid Xiongnu territory. But he was again captured and, this time, detained for more than a year.
- When the reigning *shanyu* died, the Xiongnu confederation was plunged into turmoil, and Zhang Qian grabbed the opportunity to make his way back to the Han court, probably in the year 125

B.C.E. Immediately upon his return, he was promoted to the position of supreme counselor of the palace by Wudi.

- Zhang Qian described for the emperor all the places he had visited or heard about that had been previously unknown to the Chinese. If these regions could be won over, either through alliances or conquest, it would be possible to extend Han territory for 5,000 miles.
- Over the next couple of years, Wudi employed Zhang Qian on several subsequent missions, including an attempt in 124 B.C.E. to find a different route to Bactria, following the southern paths from Sichuan through Burma. But this expedition was thwarted when the Kunming tribes of the region murdered most of the envoys.
- The following year, Zhang Qian was employed as special envoy and guide for General Wei Qing in an aggressive campaign against the Xiongnu. Because he knew where water and grazing pastures for the Han army's horses were to be found in Xiongnu territory, Zhang Qian was able to save the army from hardship. But the next year, in another expedition against the Xiongnu, the enemy ambushed and destroyed most of the Han army.
- Zhang Qian did not live to see the ultimate success of his attempts to establish closer relationships between Han China and the states of Central Asia. The great envoy died, probably in 119 or 118 B.C.E.

The Aftermath of the Expedition

- In the decade following Zhang Qian's death, Wudi had the Great Wall extended deep into the deserts of western China. He also sent numerous large missions into Central Asia. Sima Qian was in no doubt that the courageous and ethical Zhang Qian was personally responsible for the massive and rapid expansion of Chinese interests into Central Asia.

- Zhang Qian's report to the emperor was largely responsible for enticing China out of millennia of relative isolation and into active engagement with the rest of Central Asia, including, ultimately, the Romans.
- In the next lecture, we will see how these personal endeavors bore extraordinary fruit, as the great caravans laden with silk and other Chinese goods began to make their ponderous way from China toward the west, following in the footsteps of the great Zhang Qian.

Suggested Reading

Benjamin, "Hungry for Han Goods?"

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads*.

Questions to Consider

1. What were the emperor Wudi's motives in recruiting Zhang Qian as an envoy?
2. Did Zhang Qian almost singlehandedly change the course of history by opening up the Silk Roads?

Silk Roads—Perils of Camels and Caravans

Lecture 16

Up until the early 1st century B.C.E., the thousands of years of isolation experienced by humans in East Asia had meant that many of the distinctive qualities and beliefs of Eastern civilization had developed in a sort of cultural vacuum. But as we have seen, all this changed during the 400-year rule of the Han dynasty. The Han found themselves in control of a vast agrarian empire, ruling during one of the great ages of Eastern civilization: a period of internal unity and strong, centralized bureaucratic government but also of dynamic imperial expansion that allowed Eastern civilization to join the existing Afro-Eurasian trading and exchange system for the first time.

Geographical Challenges to Silk Roads Merchants

- Chinese traders commenced their journey on the Silk Roads at the early Han capital of Changan. They followed the Great Wall of China westward, through the narrow Gansu Corridor, until they reached the frontier oasis town of Dunhuang, which became the staging post for Chinese caravans.
 - During the Han, Dunhuang was the most westerly military garrison town in China, a lush oasis in an otherwise hostile desert environment, providing water, fresh food, and accommodation for merchants and soldiers.
 - Throughout the Silk Roads era, the sand dune-fringed city of Dunhuang provided the only access both westward and eastward for traders and for religious pilgrims.
 - Today, in the Mogao Caves (just outside of the city) or the nearby Yulin Grottoes, we find striking evidence of the role the region played, not just in the transport of material goods but in the dissemination of religious and intellectual ideas. The caves contain some of the greatest religious art galleries

of the ancient world—thousands of magnificently realized and vividly colored Buddhist wall paintings.

- From Dunhuang, the caravans were faced with two alternative routes, both long and challenging and both circumventing the formidable Taklamakan Desert. The name Taklamakan might be of Uyghur origin, meaning “to leave alone, to abandon,” or it might be a Turkic word meaning “the place of ruins.” The Taklamakan is the 17th-largest desert on earth and long functioned as a natural barrier between East and West.
- The Taklamakan is surrounded by enormous snow-covered mountain ranges: the Kunlun Massif to the south, the Pamirs to the west, and the Tien Shan to the north.
 - Melting snows and rainfall from these mountains help sustain thriving oasis towns at the fringes of the desert. These oasis towns provided resources and accommodation for the Silk Roads caravans, making large-scale trade possible.
 - A caravan, having set off from Dunhuang and chosen either the northern or southern route around the desert, would rest each night in one of these oasis towns as it skirted the desert. Eventually, both routes would come back together 1,300 miles later at the town of Kashgar, at the far western end of the Taklamakan.
- At this point, the Chinese traders had finished their outward journey. They would hand their goods over to middlemen—Kushan, Sogdian, or Indian merchants—who would move the Chinese exports further westward toward their ultimate destination of Rome. At the same time, the original traders would pick up a range of Western and Central Asian goods and take these back to Changan.
- The middlemen also had a range of route options available as they moved the Chinese silk westward.
 - One way headed through Bactria and Samarkand and on to the Iranian plateau, where the goods would be passed on to other

Persian or Greek merchants for transportation through Parthia and on to the shores of the Mediterranean.

- Another way went south, following the route of the modern Karakoram Highway, to end up in port cities in northwest India, from which goods could be sent by ship to Roman Egypt via the Red Sea.

Visiting the *Caravanserais*

- At each of the oasis towns along the land routes, traders would have stayed in what later became known as a *caravanserai*. This is a Persian compound word describing a home or shelter for caravans.
- The *caravanserais* were roadside inns where travelers could rest and recover from the day's journey. Typically, these establishments were large, single buildings with a square-walled exterior and a single portal wide enough to permit large or heavily laden beasts, such as camels, to enter. The courtyard would be open to the sky, and along the inside walls were stalls, bays, niches, or chambers to accommodate merchants and their servants, their animals, and their merchandise.
- Intense exchanges took place in these *caravanserais* between thousands of merchants for many centuries. The inns made possible not only the transmission of huge quantities of valuable goods but also the dissemination of the great ideas of ancient civilizations.
- The most frequent topic of conversation must have been the physical challenges of the routes, how to pass around the deserts, how to find a way through the great mountain ranges, and whether the snow on the passes was deep or negotiable.

Traversing the Mountain Ranges

- Surrounding the Taklamakan Desert in all directions is equally hostile terrain, particularly the Gobi Desert, and the highest mountain ranges on earth. The Himalayas and her outliers—the

Karakorum, the Hindu Kush, the Pamirs, the Kunlun, and the Tien Shan—help to isolate East Asia from Central Asia and India.

- A particularly challenging barrier that separates far western China from Bactria is the Pamir Knot, a conglomeration of several mountain ranges that have been forced by plate tectonic movements into a twisted knot of blind valleys and high passes. Travelers heading to the west or south had no option other than to make their way along icy passes through the knot if they wanted to head west or through the equally formidable Karakorum Range if their intention was to head south to the port cities of India.
- The modern Karakorum Highway, which joins China and Pakistan along the highest paved road in the world, follows the major southern branch route of the ancient Silk Roads. As travelers on the highway today negotiate the 15,500-foot Khunjerab Pass, they get some sense of the challenges that merchants on the Silk Roads must have faced 2,000 years earlier.
- We have a superb glimpse of the challenging environment of the Khunjerab Pass as it was during the first Silk Roads era: 2,000-year-old references in Ban Gu's *History of the Early Han* to what was then called the Hanging Pass.
 - According to Ban Gu, the inhabitants of the region “live in the mountains and work the land that lies between the rocks. They pile up stones on one another to make dwellings. The inhabitants drink by joining their hands together.”
 - This is clearly a description of a small settlement located high up in the mountains, where the inhabitants live in stone huts and eke out a precarious agricultural existence on terraces built up by stone walls on the steep hillsides.
 - The intriguing reference to “joining their hands together” to drink might suggest the necessity of linking arms in a human chain to reach a water supply in the steep, rocky gorges of the region!



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The Bactrian camel, the preferred beast of burden along the Silk Roads, has two humps composed of fat as well as sealable nostrils to help keep out flying dust and debris during sandstorms.

- Later in the *Han Shu*, a Han envoy named Tuzhin gives an eyewitness account of his crossing of the Hanging Pass: “The danger of these precipices is beyond description.”
- The Bactrian camel is native to the steppes of Central Asia, and it quickly became the preferred beast of burden for traders because it was so perfectly adapted to this unforgiving environment. The camels were able to spread their toes widely and use the webbing between to walk on sand and climb the huge sand dunes of the region. It is no exaggeration to suggest that if there had been no Bactrian camels, Silk Roads trade would have been on a much smaller, perhaps barely sustainable, scale.

Silk Roads Commodities

- Although the Han iron we discussed in a previous lecture was a valuable export, by far the most important commodity being carried out of China by the caravans was silk, a light and sensual textile that was greatly prized by the aristocrats of the Roman Empire.

- The origins of the silk industry, or sericulture, are somewhat mysterious. According to Chinese legend, it was the Lady Xiling, wife of the mythical Yellow Emperor, said to have ruled China in about 3000 B.C., who first discovered the secret of silk.
- In 1927, archaeologists discovered a segment of an ancient silkworm cocoon preserved in loess soil along the banks of the Huang He that was later radiometrically dated to somewhere between 2600 and 2300 B.C.E. However, a more recent archeological find, including a small ivory cup carved with a silkworm design and accompanied by silk-spinning tools, has been dated to a much earlier time, perhaps as far back as 5000 B.C.E. This discovery suggests that silk worms were being domesticated almost from the beginning of agriculture in China.
- Many of the Zhou dynasty classics that we have discussed contain practical information about sericulture, particularly the *Book of History* and the *Book of Rites*. From them, we learn that the reeling and spinning of silk were household duties for women, who carried out these tasks in specialized workshops, as well as in their homes.
 - In silk-producing regions, all the women of the extended family worked long hours each day for as long as six months a year, feeding, tending, and supervising silkworms and unraveling, spinning, weaving, dyeing, and embroidering silk.
 - Sericulture became so deeply engrained in Chinese women's culture that each spring, the empress herself symbolically inaugurated the silk-raising season.
- Once Silk Roads trade began, the Chinese realized that they possessed the secrets to the production of a highly valuable commodity, which meant that the techniques of sericulture needed to be kept a closely guarded secret and controlled by the authorities so that the exporters (and the government) did not lose their monopoly.

- During the first Silk Roads era, Han border guards in Dunhuang searched the caravans of Bactrian camels to ensure that no silkworms were onboard.
- Anyone who revealed the secrets of sericulture or smuggled the silkworm eggs or cocoons outside of China would be punished by death.
- Most Romans, the principal customers for Chinese silk, had no idea that the fabric derived from the cocoon of a small worm. Instead, they thought it grew on trees. In our next lecture, we will pick up the story of the Silk Roads from the Roman perspective.

Suggested Reading

Christian and Benjamin, eds., *Worlds of the Silk Roads*.

Franck and Brownstone, *The Silk Roads: A History*.

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads*.

Questions to Consider

1. How were traders able to establish and conduct large-scale trade through some of the harshest environments on the planet?
2. How critical was the Bactrian camel to the success of the Silk Roads?

Silk Roads—Rome and Roads from the West

Lecture 17

During the first Silk Roads era, roughly 100 B.C.E. to 300 C.E., many of the technological and cultural innovations of Eastern civilization began to percolate into Central and West Eurasia. We'll look at the impact of Eastern culture on the West in this period by asking four linked questions: What political and social changes in the Roman state were necessary to allow for Roman engagement with Central and East Asia? How did traders from the Mediterranean organize their end of the exchange network? What impact did silk and other commodities from Asia have on the culture of the Greco-Romans? What do we know about other significant conduits of Silk Roads trade during this period, such as the maritime routes?

Political and Social Structure in the Roman World

- Following the devastating war with Hannibal and subsequent rapid Roman expansion into Greece and Asia, by the mid-2nd century B.C.E., Rome faced critical economic and social problems.
 - The small farms of Italy had been destroyed by Hannibal, and many of the farmers had been recruited as soldiers; after the wars, these veterans flocked to Rome to join the ranks of the unemployed and discontented.
 - Wealthy patrician farmers bought up much of the abandoned land and used slaves to grow profitable commercial crops, such as olive trees for olive oil and grapes for wine, instead of much-needed grain.
 - At the same time, Roman governors sent to administer the new provinces generally behaved in a corrupt manner, viewing their appointment as an opportunity to enrich themselves and provide their cronies with lucrative government contracts.
- The Roman government was still a senatorial oligarchy, and the tribunes who were elected directly by the people to look after the

peoples' concerns were mere puppets of the Senate. Government seemed focused on protecting the rights of the rich and powerful; it had no solutions for poverty and no idea how to govern the large, quasi-imperial state that Rome had become.

- These political and economic conditions led ultimately to the collapse of the Roman Republic and its replacement by the Roman Empire but only after a century of bloodshed and civil war. The first of these wars was fought between Gaius Marius, champion of the people, and Lucius Cornelius Sulla, champion of the Senate, which Sulla won. Sulla then served as “dictator” for the Senate, exercising virtually absolute power, until he retired in 79 B.C.E.
- In 70 B.C.E., Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, better known as Pompey, was elected consul, and in 59 B.C.E., Julius Caesar was elected. Caesar immediately left Rome and spent the next nine years campaigning in Gaul, accumulating a personal fortune and training a highly skilled and loyal personal army.
 - When Caesar crossed the Rubicon and returned to Rome, having refused to obey the orders of the Senate and disband his army, Pompey and most of the Senate fled to Greece.
 - Caesar pursued them and routed Pompey and the Senate’s army, bringing an end to this second civil war.
 - By 46 B.C.E., the victorious Julius Caesar was master of the Roman state, and he assumed the title of “dictator for the administration of public affairs.”
- It is easy to understand why, during this period of civil war and widespread poverty, serious trade with Asia was virtually impossible; the demand wasn’t present, nor was the infrastructure there to support large-scale, long-distance mercantile activity.
 - Caesar started to argue publicly that the old republic was unsustainable and essentially dead; some other form of more stable government was needed in its place.

- But after accusations that he was acting like a tyrant, Caesar was assassinated in the Senate in 44 B.C.E. by Brutus and others claiming that they were attempting to restore Roman liberty and the republic.
- After the murder of Caesar, his adopted teenage son, Octavian, decided to avenge Caesar's murder by marching on Rome with his loyal legions. The assassins fled, but Octavian pursued and defeated them in this third civil war, then seized power in Caesar's name. This was the moment, around 27 B.C.E., that the republic effectively gave way to an empire and the moment that Rome was able to turn from an internal focus on power struggles and civil wars to expand its outlook, political interests, and commercial reach deep into Asia.
- For the next three decades, Octavian governed as a virtual dictator, although he carefully appeared to rule with due deference to the Senate and to observe the old republican rituals and institutions. In gratitude, the Senate named him Augustus ("revered one") because he had ended the civil war and restored stability to the state. The 30-year reign of Augustus ushered in a golden age known as the Pax Romana—the "Roman Peace."
- Augustus enlarged the empire, built new roads, reduced government corruption, created a permanent standing army, and established



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The active engagement of the Romans in the Silk Roads trade can be directly attributed to the political circumstances surrounding the advent of the emperor Augustus.

colonies for veterans. Social relations between classes improved, and the economy revived, which helped give rise to a new era of peace and optimism.

- With peace reestablished in the empire and a vibrant, growing economy in place, there was a natural demand for the import of luxury goods. Roman and Greek traders began to feel confident enough to invest in long-distance trade.

Roman and Greek Traders

- We have surprisingly good details about the major Silk Roads routes out of the eastern Mediterranean, partly because of an account left behind by an active merchant named Isidorus of Charax. Isidorus was a Parthian Greek heavily engaged in Silk Roads trade; around the year 1 C.E., he produced an account of the western routes in a text entitled *Parthian Stations*.
- From the Greco-Roman metropolis of Antioch, traders first crossed the harsh Syrian Desert via *caravanserais* and the trading cities of Palmyra and Ctesiphon, the capital of the Parthian Empire. From there, traders headed to Seleucia on the Tigris River. Then, the route climbed through the Zagros Mountains, heading east to the cities of Ecbatana and eventually toward Merv, beyond the high Iranian plateau.
 - From Merv, one branch turned north via Bukhara and the Ferghana Valley and then east into Mongolia before dropping south toward Han China.
 - The other route led directly into the great Kushan heartland of Bactria, thence through the Pamirs and on into the Han Empire via the Taklimakan Desert routes.
 - No Greco-Roman trader would have followed this complete route, however. Like their Chinese counterparts, the Mediterranean merchants passed their goods onto Parthian and Kushan middlemen somewhere along the way, perhaps near Merv.

- As the historian John Charlesworth noted in the 1920s, what was at the heart of the exchanges of the civilizations of China, India, and the Greco-Roman West was not so much the commodities themselves but the cultural cross-pollination that took place among the traders.

Cross-Cultural Fertilization

- A critical result of all the Silk Roads trade was a sort of two-way cross-cultural fertilization.
 - As the Han expanded into Central Asia, many of China's new neighbors became sinicized, the result of the westward diffusion of some of the foundations of Eastern civilization.
 - Many of the states of Central Asia found themselves bound to the Han in a tributary relationship, in which Chinese goods and ideas spread out of Changan and into the courts and societies of other cities and kingdoms.
 - At the same time, Chinese culture was also being transformed, as different crops, technologies, diseases, and ideas moved into China. During the Han dynasty, Chinese intellectuals were concerned about the unwholesome effect all this cultural borrowing had on the core beliefs of Eastern civilization.
 - Similar concerns were expressed by cultural conservatives in Rome, although Rome proved more adaptable to diffusion from the East.
- Of course, the question of cultural flexibility is somewhat academic, because whatever the attitude of conservatives, the demand for silk in Rome was unstoppable.
 - Even by late-republican times, before the full flowering of Silk Roads trade, patrician women were convinced that their most fashionable garments had to be made of silk.
 - By the age of Augustus, Roman poets adorned their verses with allusions to the elegant and even erotic texture of silk.

- Once the obsession spread to men, however, the Roman Senate felt compelled to issue edicts prohibiting the wearing of silk, on both economic and moral grounds.
- The massive imports of Chinese silk also cost the Romans a fortune. In 77 C.E., Pliny the Elder thundered to the Senate: “And by the lowest reckoning, India, China and Arabia take from our empire 100 million sesterces every year. That is the sum which our women and our luxuries cost us!”

Maritime Routes

- Although the overland trade routes were by far the most significant during this first great flowering of the Silk Roads, maritime routes became increasingly important, as well. Sea routes became even more attractive as the political relationship between Rome and the Parthian Empire deteriorated.
- We have incredible insight into the expansion of maritime trade during this period in the form of a sailors’ handbook written sometime in the 1st century C.E. known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.
 - During the 1st century or earlier, sailors discovered the secret of trade winds, which led to a dramatic increase in the volume of maritime trade between Roman Egypt and India. Sailors learned that they could chart a course across the deep waters of the Indian Ocean, confident that the monsoon winds would blow them eastward on to the coast of India in one season and then westward back to Africa a few months later.
 - Before long, a network of sea routes linked the incense ports of southern Arabia and Somalia with ports in the Persian Gulf and India in the east and with Roman and Arabian ports on the Red Sea, from where merchandise would be transported overland.
 - The goods mentioned in the *Periplus* that were being carried in large oceangoing trade ships included silk, along with precious stones, cotton, wine, metals, pepper, glass, and large quantities

of Roman coins. The coins may have been melted down and used by the Kushans for their own gold coinage. We will turn to the Kushans, the great facilitators of the Silk Roads, in our next lecture.

Suggested Reading

Benjamin and Liu, eds., *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History*.

Christian and Benjamin, eds., *Realms of the Silk Roads*.

Franck and Brownstone, *The Silk Roads: A History*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the demand for expensive luxury goods in Rome result in the connection of much of Afro-Eurasia into a single system of exchanges?
2. How important did maritime routes become to Silk Roads trade?

Silk Roads—The Lost Kushan Empire

Lecture 18

During the first two centuries of the Common Era, the Kushans dominated a huge area of inner Asia, stretching from modern Uzbekistan in the north to central India in the south and from the Iranian plateau in the west to the Tarim Basin in the east. The Kushans created a stable political entity at the heart of Central Asia, which allowed for the flowering of trans-Eurasian mercantile and cultural exchange that took place along the Silk Roads. Although the role of the Kushans is often underestimated and remains virtually unknown outside of specialist circles, in this lecture, we'll see just how crucial they were, not just to Eastern civilization but to world history.

Political History of the Kushans

- The political history of the Kushans falls neatly into four distinct periods. The first of these follows directly from the story of the Yuezhi, from whom the Kushans were descended. As you recall, the defeat of the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu around 162 B.C.E. had sent these people on a 30-year migration deep into Central Asia.
 - The Yuezhi remained settled north of the Amu Darya for the next half century or so, until perhaps the year 80 B.C.E., when they left their strongholds in northern Bactria, crossed the Amu Darya, and occupied Bactria proper (modern Afghanistan). At about the same time, they divided into five tribal subdivisions called *yabghu*, each of which then occupied its own strategic region of Bactria.
 - More than a century later, sometime around the year 45 C.E., a prince of one of these *yabghu* reunited the tribes into one powerful confederation and began to build what would become the Kushan Empire.
- The second phase of Kushan history was dominated by three strong kings. Kujula Kadphises, the first king of the Kushans, reigned

from probably 45 to 85 C.E. His rise to power is described in the annals of the later Han dynasty, the *Hou Hanshu*.

- In response to the occupation of the Kabul Valley by an Indo-Parthian ruler named Gondophares, Kujula united the forces of the five *yabghu* and led them over the Hindu Kush, conquering the Kabul Valley and evicting Gondophares, then invading Kashmir, Peshawar, and the Swat Valley.
- Kujula was a contemporary of several Roman emperors, and numismatic evidence shows the influence of Roman coinage on early Kushan coins. One series of coins issued by Kujula features a bust clearly modeled on that of Emperor Augustus.
- As we saw in our last lecture, by the mid-1st century C.E., the Romans were already heavily involved in the silk and luxury trade with India, Central Asia, and China. Of course, the Kushans, now in control of a substantial empire straddling most of the major east-west and north-south trade routes, were ideally positioned to benefit from the trade.
- Kujula and his successors also exerted Kushan influence on the western borders of the now greatly expanded Han Empire. The Han general Ban Zhao seems to have sought Kushan assistance against the Xiongnu during Kujula's reign and permitted the Kushans to exercise economic control over some states in return.
- But in 88 C.E., the Kushans apparently overstepped their limits; Ban Zhao refused to allow a Kushan envoy safe passage through the Tarim Basin to China. In response, the Kushans sent a force of 70,000 to attack Ban Zhao, but it was eventually forced to withdraw.
- Kujula was succeeded by his son Vima Taktu around 85 C.E. and his grandson Vima Kadphises about 15 years later, in 100 C.E. The *Hou Hanshu* mentions only Vima Kadphises as Kujula's successor,

but the existence of a third member of the dynasty had long been suspected because of ambiguous coin references.

- The positive identification of King Vima Taktu was the result of a discovery made in war-torn Afghanistan in 1993. At a site known as the Kafir's Castle in Rabatak, local people dug up a stone inscription in Bactrian script made in the name of Kanishka, the successor of Vima Kadphises.
- The inscription clearly lists the genealogy of Kanishka's royal line as Kujula Kadphises (great-grandfather), Vima Taktu (grandfather), and Vima Kadphises (father).
- Kujula Kadphises and his son issued coins largely based on the Greek and Roman monetary practices already in place in Bactria. But with the accession of Vima Kadphises, Kushan coins began to take on their own distinctive character.
- Since the 1950s, a number of fragmentary inscriptions on stone have also been discovered throughout Kushan territory, many of them using what has come to be called Bactrian script, a combination of the Indian Kharosthi alphabet with Classical Greek letters.

The Great Kushans

- With the accession of Kanishka the Great to the throne, probably in 127 B.C.E., Kushan history entered its third and most significant phase, that of the Great Kushans.
- Kanishka, who reigned until about 153 C.E., introduced a new dating system, engraving his coins and inscriptions from the "Year 1" of a new "Kanishkan Era." This practice had led scholars to conclude that Kanishka was the founder of a new dynasty, but the Rabatak inscription clearly shows that his reign represented a continuance of the family line begun by Kujula Kadphises.
- An uninterrupted line of succession can also be traced between Kanishka and his successors, down to at least the second quarter of the 3rd century C.E. This means that the Kushan family dynasty

established by Kujula was able to provide stable hereditary rule for about two centuries, a significant part of the reason for Kushan success.

- Kanishka presided over a vast, wealthy, multicultural, and relatively peaceful empire that straddled all the major Silk Roads routes in an era that many scholars have called the Golden Age of ancient Central Asia.
- Kanishka and his successors continued to issue the full range of copper and gold coins established by Vima. The remarkable weight and denomination consistency maintained by the Kushan coin minters is further evidence of economic stability and strong central government.
 - The coin images, depicting Iranian, Greek, and Indian gods, seem to indicate that the Kushan kings had a tolerant and broadminded approach to religion and that all the religions practiced within their great multicultural state were worthy of support.
 - But the overwhelming preponderance is of gods from the Iranian Zoroastrian pantheon, and the standard Kanishkan royal portrait is commonly the king sacrificing over a small Zoroastrian fire altar.
- Intriguingly, Kanishka is also recognized in Chinese sources as a great patron of Buddhism, and the depiction of the Buddha on some of his gold and copper coins is among the first physical representations of the Buddha ever created.
 - Kanishka is venerated in the Buddhist tradition for having convened a great Buddhist council in Kashmir, at which the various and often competing strands of Buddhism were debated and refined.
 - We read about this meeting, which was critical to the spread of Buddhism into China, in the account of the 7th-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang. According to this source, the

council was responsible for composing “300,000 stanzas and 660,000 words which completely explain the scriptures.”

- Xuanzang also says that Kanishka had these new scriptures translated into Sanskrit and transcribed on copper plates, which were housed in stone coffers and deposited inside a tremendous stupa, or tower, more than 400 feet high.
- The more accessible Sanskrit version of the Buddhist scriptures was partly responsible for a surge in the popularity of Mahayana (“Great Vehicle”) Buddhism, which was carried across Central Asia into China by pilgrims using the Silk Roads.
- For this reason alone, the Kushans are critical to the story of the foundations of Eastern civilization: It was Kanishka’s patronage of Buddhism that facilitated its spread out of India into China.
- In addition to their tolerant approach to coinage, language, and religion, the Great Kushan kings were great supporters of art. Excavations of the Kushan royal palaces near Begram in Afghanistan and near Rawalpindi in Pakistan have unearthed an array of magnificent art objects, including Syrian and Egyptian glassware, steppe-nomadic gold jewelry, carved bone and ivory from India, bronze owls from Rome, and Chinese lacquer bowls.
 - The Great Kushan kings were also patrons of important art schools, sponsoring major sculpture workshops in the regions of Gandhara in Pakistan and Mathura in India. The output of these schools profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Asian art.
 - These artists, perhaps acting under direct Kushan royal instruction, created a physical representation of the Buddha that was a synthesis of Bactrian, Iranian, Indian, and Hellenistic cultural influences. This image quickly spread along the trade routes, penetrating India as far south as Sri Lanka and through China into Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia.

The Later Kushans

- Following the death of the last of the Great Kushans, King Vasudeva in about 225, Kushan history entered its final phase, called the Later Kushans.
- A formidable new power had appeared in Iran early in the 3rd century, King Ardashir of the Sasanians, and he soon began raiding into Kushan territory. By 262 C.E., the great Kushan palaces had both been destroyed, and the northwestern areas of the Kushan Empire were now incorporated into a new Sasanian state named Kushanshar.
- In India, the rise of small, militarily vigorous states gradually undermined Kushan power. Still, the cultural development of the northern Indian states was strongly influenced by their Kushan heritage.
- Although the political disintegration of the Kushan Empire occurred quite quickly and brought to an end the Golden Age of ancient Central Asia, the cultural, political, and economic achievements of the Kushans continued to influence their regional successors for centuries afterwards.
- The disintegration of the Kushan Empire in the mid-3rd century C.E. was just one in a series of calamitous political collapses that occurred at more or less the same moment across Eurasia during a cycle of civilizational contraction.



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Before the Kushan sponsorship of art schools in Gandhara and Mathura, the Buddha had not been represented in physical form but only through symbols, such as footprints or an umbrella.

- The later Han dynasty officially ended in 220 C.E., after warlords had succeeded in taking control of most of China.
- The Parthian Empire was replaced by the Sasanians at more or less the same time, and the Roman Empire now found itself in the midst of the so-called crisis of the 3rd century, during which 26 different emperors reigned, most of them ineffectively and most of them dying a violent death.
- With political instability all along the Silk Roads, particularly in the regions that had generated both the supply and demand for silk, long-distance trade dried up and almost disappeared.

Suggested Reading

Benjamin, “The Kushans.”

———, “The Kushans in World History.”

———, ““The great deliverer, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god, worthy of worship.””

Questions to Consider

1. Should the Kushans be regarded as one of the most important “lost civilizations” in world history?
2. What ultimately was the most important type of exchange along the Silk Roads—material, intellectual, or biological?

Origins of Buddhism

Lecture 19

As we've seen in the last few lectures, the cultural exchange fostered by the Silk Roads was a two-way street; foundational technologies and ideologies traveled from Eastern civilizations westward and from Eurasia to the east. Chief among these ideas coming from Eurasia, in terms of the subsequent impact it would have on Eastern civilization, was the Indian spiritual philosophy of Buddhism. In this lecture, we will explore the Indian origins of Buddhism. We will then follow up in the next lecture with a more detailed account of its spread into China and East Asia in the centuries following the collapse of the Han dynasty, another bitterly fragmented and violent period that has been called the Age of Disunity.

Indus and Indo-Aryan Civilizations

- The Indus civilization emerged around 2300 B.C.E. and reached its peak in roughly 2000 B.C.E. The religion of this civilization remains somewhat mysterious, but the people of the Indus almost certainly venerated gods and goddesses associated with procreation. By 1700 B.C.E., Indus civilization had largely disappeared, probably as a result of environmental problems that changed the course of the Indus River.
- Two centuries later, from about 1500 B.C.E., bands of Indo-European-speaking migrants from the Iranian plateau began to filter into the Indus Valley. These migrants are known as the Indo-Aryans, and they rapidly became the dominant cultural group in Pakistan and North India.
- The culture and religion these migrants brought with them assimilated with the older Indus civilization practices, and the syncretic mix that emerged became the foundation for the subsequent political, social, and spiritual organization of India.

- Under the leadership of their priests, the Brahmins, the Aryans worshiped their deities through sacrificial rituals, accompanied by the singing of hymns called *rig*, which were composed by the Brahmins in an attempt to directly communicate with the gods. Between 1400 and 900 B.C.E., the Brahmins gathered together more than 1,000 of these hymns into a collection called the Rig-Veda—the “hymns of knowledge.”
- An important component of the religious practices of the Aryans was the division of the population into a hereditary, unchangeable social class structure known as the caste system. By about 1000 B.C.E., the Aryans recognized four main social classes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (nobles and warriors), Vaishyas (commoners, artisans, and merchants), and Shudras (landless peasants and serfs). Later, a fifth caste was added—the Untouchables—those who handled dead meat or animal products.
- These developments culminated in the Golden Age of the Vedic religion, between roughly 1000 and 600 B.C.E. The Rig-Veda was set to music using sophisticated *ragas*; sacrifices to the gods took place; and sacred rituals and formulas emerged to solve life’s problems. Because only the Brahmins possessed the knowledge to perform the rituals, they enjoyed enormous status, while the rest of Indian society remained divided into the rigid categories of caste.

The Upanishads

- Around 600 B.C.E., a radical Brahmin sect emerged that embraced mysticism, extreme spiritual discipline, and yogic meditation. Their new approaches were written down in a collection called the Upanishads.
- The central idea of these beliefs is that the light of consciousness within each individual comes from an eternal, sacred energy at the heart of the universe.
 - The Upanishads claimed that the soul had the ability to transmigrate, but the nature of this migration was dependent on the accumulation of karma. Good deeds meant the

accumulation of good karma and the migration of a soul to heaven, but bad deeds resulted in bad karma and reincarnation into a lower caste or even subhuman life form.

- This continuous birth and rebirth of the soul into a new body was an endless and tedious process, but it could be avoided by adopting the ascetic life of meditation.
- Despite these new ideas, Vedic religion remained essentially agricultural, focused on ritual sacrifices offered by Brahmins in the hope that the gods would reward their loyal servants with good harvests.
 - But as Indian society became more urbanized, these rituals seemed less appropriate to merchants and artisans living in the towns and cities.
 - At the same time, the fact that the Brahmins remained exempt from taxation and received generous fees and gifts for their services led to growing resentment among the middle and lower castes.
 - Alternative religions and philosophies emerged that rejected the traditional Vedic religion and appealed directly to the new social classes. The most important of these new philosophies, Jainism and Buddhism, both turned to intense spirituality as an alternative to the mechanical rituals of the Brahmins.
 - Jainists believed that virtually everything that existed in the universe had a soul, even air, bodies of water, and rocks. Devout Jainist monks went to extremes to avoid harming the millions of souls they inevitably encountered each day.
 - A more practical alternative to the cult of the Brahmins was Buddhism, which shares some beliefs with Jainism but whose practice was not as difficult to observe.

Life of the Buddha

- The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in about 563 B.C.E. into a wealthy Kshatriya family in a small northern state in the foothills of the Himalayas. Siddhartha's father was determined that his son would never know misery.
- Siddhartha married his cousin, excelled in his studies, and was being groomed to succeed his father as governor when he suddenly became dissatisfied with his comfortable life and started making short journeys in disguise outside the walls of the palace. He quickly became aware of the frailty and mortality of humans and the fact that, for most people, life included a great deal of suffering.
- As he witnessed misery among ordinary people, Siddhartha learned of the wandering ascetics who had withdrawn from the world to lead holy lives in an attempt to perfect their souls. Sometime around 524 B.C.E., he left his family and home to take up the ascetic life himself and wander the land to gain insight into suffering.
- He wandered the Ganges Valley for years in search of enlightenment, but none of the tactics of extreme asceticism gave him the answers he sought. Eventually, he abandoned asceticism and, according to legend, sat down under a huge banyan tree to meditate on a better path. Just before dawn on his 50th day underneath the tree, he gained the insights he sought. At that moment of enlightenment, he became the Buddha, which means "the awakened one."
- The Buddha announced his new doctrine in a foundational sermon referred to as the "Turning of the Wheel of Law," the beginning of his quest to promulgate his philosophy of compassion. He quickly attracted disciples, whom he organized into a monastic order. For more than 40 years (until his death in around 483 B.C.E.), the Buddha personally led his disciples throughout northern India, preaching his message.

Essential Beliefs of Buddhism

- Buddhism is often called the Middle Way because it resides somewhere between normal human life and the extremes of asceticism; that is, Buddhism demands only a moderate amount of renunciation and deviation from living a normal life.
- Buddhism is based on a doctrine known as the Four Noble Truths.
 - The first truth is that suffering dominates the human experience.
 - The second is that the cause of all suffering is desire or rampant ambition.
 - The third truth is that suffering can be extinguished by extinguishing desire; this makes possible the attainment of nirvana, a state in which the fire of desire has been extinguished.
 - The fourth truth outlines the Eightfold Path that leads out of the suffering caused by excessive desire to the state of nirvana. Adherents must pursue right views; right resolve; right speech; right conduct; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; and right concentration, that is, lead a decent, ethical, and meditative life. Those who pursue this path—whatever their social or economic status—can escape the cycle of reincarnation and achieve nirvana, a state of perfect spiritual independence.
- Buddhism was never intended to be a religion; the Buddha himself was critical of all earlier religions and claimed to be an agnostic, with no knowledge or belief in a God or gods. It quickly became a popular spiritual philosophy in India because it explicitly rejected any notion of social hierarchy.

The Spread of Buddhism

- Buddhists were clever at spreading their ideals among the masses of ancient Indian society. For example, in their sermons, both the Buddha and his disciples avoided using Sanskrit, which was the literary language used by the Brahmins in their rituals; instead, they



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Buddhists erected stupas at sites associated with the Buddha's life; these domed shrines were said to house relics of the Buddha and of his first disciples.

used vernacular, local tongues that reached a much larger audience. Buddhists also recognized the power of holy sites, which soon became focal points for devotion.

- From the beginning, the Buddhists were also incredibly well organized. The monastic organization that the Buddha founded during his lifetime proved extremely efficient at spreading the Buddhist message and gaining converts, and the same was true when Buddhist monasteries began to appear all over East Asia.
- The monasteries were supported by gifts from pious lay supporters and, before long, by entire governments in China, Korea, and Japan. In India, Buddhism was given an incredible boost through the patronage of the Mauryan dynasty, the first dynasty to impose a unified imperial structure on India.
- Like all great spiritual ideologies, Buddhism had to deal with major doctrinal struggles, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of

even more accessible and popular versions of the ideology; these are the versions that moved into East Asia.

- In its purest form, Buddhism involved a great deal of sacrifice—giving up personal property and the desire for social standing.
- But developments in Buddhist theology opened new, less demanding avenues for salvation, a significant contributing factor in the explosion of popularity in the faith that followed.
- The first of these developments was the deification of the Buddha himself. A second important development was the appearance of the *bodhisattva*, which means “an enlightened being.” These were individuals who had already reached spiritual perfection and, thus, merited the rewards of nirvana, but who intentionally delayed their entry into nirvana to help others who were still struggling.
- This reformed version of Buddhism—Mahayana Buddhism, or the Greater Vehicle—spread rapidly throughout India and into Central Asia in the centuries on either side of the Common Era divide. It was Mahayana Buddhism that traveled along the Silk Roads, as monks and merchants carried the faith into China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. We will follow these monks into China in the next lecture.

Suggested Reading

Aldiss, ed., *Zen Sourcebook*.

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 4.

Schirokauer et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider

1. How were the life experiences of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) crucial to the development of his extraordinary spiritual philosophy?
2. What were some of the attractions of Buddhism, set to become a new pillar of Eastern civilization, for people in India during the last few centuries of the 1st millennium B.C.E.?

The Age of Disunity

Lecture 20

In this last lecture, we traced the origins of Buddhism in 6th-century India and saw how it was gradually transformed from a philosophy into a religion. During the first two centuries of the Common Era, Buddhist monks and merchants spread their new Mahayana version of the faith as they moved into Central and East Asia along the Silk Roads. In this lecture, we'll follow the spread of Buddhism into China, which after the fall of the Han dynasty entered another cycle of fragmentation and conflict. In this Age of Disunity, Buddhism emerged as a genuine alternative to Confucianism and Daoism, offering the people of China new hope for salvation.

The Three Kingdoms

- The last years of the Han dynasty were blighted by corruption and political infighting among three powerful groups: eunuchs, clans of the empresses, and Confucian officials. None of these groups could improve the harsh lives of peasants, and late in the last decades of the Han, peasant insurgents of the Yellow Turban Rebellion swarmed destructively across the north China plain.
- Power fell into the hands of local governors and warlords, such as the ruthless and ambitious poet-general Cao Cao and his son Cao Pi. The last figurehead Han, Emperor Xian, reigned until 220, when Cao Pi finally forced his abdication and brought an end to the Han dynastic era of Chinese history.
- The three and a half centuries that followed were marked by political division and a series of smaller regional governments, none of which was able to reunite China. In some ways, this Age of Disunity was similar to the Dark Ages experienced in Western Europe after the collapse of Roman power.
- Ultimately, the generals assigned by the Han to put down the Yellow Turban uprising emerged as the new powers of China. Cao

Pi forced the abdication of the last Han emperor and established the Wei dynasty in the north, with its capital in Luoyang. He hoped to reunify China under Wei dynastic control, but his attempt was thwarted by rival warlords.

- A year after the Wei dynasty was declared in the north, another warlord named Liu Bei was crowned as emperor of the kingdom of Shu in the west. Eight years later, in 229, a third warlord, Sun Quan, declared himself emperor of the kingdom of Wu in the south. Three rival powers now divided China during an era known as the Three Kingdoms (230–280 C.E.).

The Jin Dynasty and Its Aftermath

- In 265, a rebel Wei dynasty leader forced the emperor to abdicate and then declared the Jin dynasty, which over the next 15 years defeated the other two kingdoms before attempting to rule a unified China under its own dynastic name.
- The Jin dynasty is divided into two periods: the Western Jin (265–316, with Luoyang as its capital) and the Eastern Jin (316–420, with Nanjing as its capital).
- The Jin unified the country, but only temporarily, because they were never able to establish a durable political structure based on the supreme authority of an emperor. Instead, conflict and intrigue between members of the royal family and the civil service debilitated the government, and centralized power was further undermined through the parceling out of enormous tracts of land to imperial princes.
- Civil war broke out and raged in the regions around Luoyang between 281 and 305 C.E. This situation gave the Xiongnu, China's ancient nomadic enemies, the opportunity they had been waiting for. In 311, Xiongnu forces sacked the Jin capital, and five years later, they sacked the ancient imperial capital of Changan.

- For more than a century after these events, China was a battleground between Xiongnu and ethnic Han Chinese during another chaotic period known as the Era of the Sixteen Kingdoms (304–439 C.E.). Millions of refugees fled south across the Yangtze, and the Chinese economy more or less collapsed.
- The southern city of Nanjing became the capital for a series of local power groups collectively known as the Southern Dynasties, which ruled until 589. Each of these southern courts had to deal with powerful hereditary aristocratic families and repeated outbreaks of violence.
- Ironically, it was these same intractable aristocratic families that effectively saved Chinese culture during this time of chaos. Unwilling to respect the authority of a series of “upstart emperors,” the old families began to see themselves as upholders of the best of Chinese cultural traditions; this view was crucial for the preservation of Eastern civilization.
- These developments had a positive impact on southern China, which now became the critical hub for the preservation of Chinese and Eastern culture. The population in the south increased dramatically, and the city of Nanjing emerged as a splendid capital and cultural center.

Rivalry in the North

- In the north, meanwhile, rival warlords from various ethnic groups continued to battle. The most successful of these groups was the Xianbei (originally from southern Manchuria), who eventually established the Northern Wei dynasty, which ruled much of northern China for almost a century (439–534). Inexperienced in statecraft, the Northern Wei rulers turned to Chinese administrators—Confucian bureaucrats—to govern their realm.
- During the reign of Emperor Xiaowen (471–499), the Wei relocated to the ruined ancient capital of Luoyang, now rebuilt as a magnificent city. Xiaowen promoted the learning of Han culture,

encouraged intermarriage between the Xianbei and the Han, and employed many Han officials in the court.

- The tough Xianbei soldiers living along the northern frontiers came to detest the Xianbei aristocrats in Luoyang for their soft, sinicized lives, excessively influenced by Chinese cultural traditions. Civil war broke out in 524; Luoyang was sacked; and 2,000 of these “soft” officials were slaughtered.
- In quick succession, a series of dynasties tried to reestablish control: the Northern Qi in 552 and the Northern Zhou five years later. In 575, the Zhou formed an alliance with the southern state of Chen to invade Qi, which was destroyed in 577, but the Zhou were, in turn, usurped by one of their own generals in 581!
- This was the moment that general Yang Jian, later known as Emperor Wen (Wendi), seized power and declared the foundation of the Sui dynasty.

Achievements of the Sui

- Although the Sui dynasty lasted for only 36 years, its rulers were able to successfully reunify much of China. After seizing power in the north, Emperor Wen used land and naval forces to conquer the south. The Sui then ambitiously set about reforming the political, economic, and military structures of China.
- The emperor and his family were committed Buddhists, and Wendi now sought to legitimize his rule by declaring himself a Buddhist king. But the Sui also used Daoist and Confucian traditions to help unify the country.
- Wendi built a new capital not far from Changan, reformed China’s military system to bring it more firmly under civilian control, and introduced a new law code that eliminated many of the cruel punishments that had persisted since the introduction of Legalism more than 800 years earlier.

- Wendi's second son, Yang Guang, succeeded to the throne and declared himself Yangdi, the "flaming emperor." His 14-year reign was also marked by extraordinarily ambitious undertakings, some successful, others less so. He amassed a great collection of manuscripts and built an elaborate library in Luoyang. By far his most ambitious project was the construction of the Grand Canal, a vast waterway ultimately stretching for 1,500 miles.
- Yangdi's massive construction projects were good for China in the long term, but they also depended on higher taxes and massive conscriptions of forced labor, which led to considerable peasant resentment. Revolts broke out in north and central China, but no one dared tell the emperor because he had previously beaten to death an official who had brought him bad news! Finally, in 618, a disgruntled general assassinated the emperor in his bathhouse, bringing an end to the Sui dynasty.

Inroads of Buddhism during the Age of Disunity

- When it first appeared, in the 1st century C.E., Buddhism was regarded by the Chinese as just another exotic religion followed by foreign merchants. But during the Age of Disunity, the Chinese people became more disillusioned about the ability of the core philosophies of their civilization to solve their problems, making them increasingly receptive to Buddhism.
- At the same time, Buddhist authorities focused their energies on winning converts among the disillusioned Chinese at all levels of the social spectrum. In the north, Buddhist missionaries focused on gaining political patronage among the rival warlords. Because of Buddhism's universalizing creed, these foreign and relatively uneducated rulers were not automatically relegated to the lower strata of Chinese culture, as they were under Confucianism.
- By the late 3rd century, Confucian elites of the Western Jin also found themselves attracted to Buddhism, and by the early 4th century, Buddhist ideas were increasingly discussed in aristocratic circles. But elite and aristocratic patronage was just the first step;



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Visitors to the city of Luoyang can still admire the magnificent Buddhist art carved into the soft limestone cliffs at Longmen.

for Buddhism to really gain a hold in China, the faith needed to win converts among the people.

- The first challenge to this endeavor was translating Buddhist texts into Chinese linguistic and cultural terms. Chinese pilgrims also began to journey to India to more deeply investigate the core beliefs of the faith.
- Later, as more accurate (and, thus, culturally distinctive) versions of Buddhism began to appear, the Buddhists continued to work hard to make their faith compatible with the core ideals of Eastern civilization and to play down areas of possible conflict. Still, contentious issues remained that were played up by Daoists and others who resented the wealth and growing influence of Buddhism. Confucians and Daoists instigated persecutions of Buddhists during the reign of the Northern Wei emperor Taiwu (r. 424–452).

- The physical landscape of China was also transformed by Buddhism during the Age of Disunity. Records indicate that by the first decades of the 6th century, the Buddhist church had built more than 9,000 temples across China. Magnificent Buddhist art and architecture decorated lavish temple and monastic complexes throughout the country.
- Daoism responded to the growing Buddhist threat by also transforming itself into a religion. Daoist “celestial masters” became renowned for their ability to heal the sick and their attempts to achieve immortality. Throughout the Age of Disunity, Daoist and Buddhist temples directly competed with each other for political patronage and popular support, while Confucianism was preserved among conservative aristocratic families.
- In the next lecture, we will see how the powerful emperors of the Tang dynasty would handle these conflicting cultural and spiritual claims for political and popular support.

Suggested Reading

Dien, *State and Society in Early Medieval China*.

Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why, after the fall of the Han, did China disintegrate into an Age of Disunity governed by warlords?
2. Why was this period of disunity an era of rich intellectual development, dominated by the spread of the Indian religion of Buddhism into China?

The Great Taizong and the Rise of the Tang

Lecture 21

The political and governmental institutions established by the Sui dynasty laid the foundation for the growth and prosperity of the succeeding Tang dynasty. The Tang ruled for the next three centuries, reorganizing China into a powerful, prosperous, unified, and culturally sophisticated society. Most of the Tang dynastic era is marked by strong and benevolent rule, successful diplomatic relationships, economic and military expansion, and a rich cosmopolitan culture. In this first lecture on this dynasty, we'll explore the political innovations of the Tang and try to situate events in China during this period in the broader context of Eurasian history and culture to show how the Tang interacted with the larger world.

Emergence of the Tang

- The Tang dynasty emerged out of the political squabbles that blighted the last few years of the Sui dynasty, although the transition between dynasties was relatively seamless.
 - The founder of the Tang, Li Yuan, had been a governor under the Sui, and was related to the Sui ruling house; he eventually rose in rebellion against the last Sui emperor.
 - Li Yuan was initially reluctant to proclaim a new dynasty. He installed a puppet child emperor of the Sui, but in 618 C.E., he removed the child and declared the Tang dynasty. He ruled under the imperial name Gaozu.
- Gaozu ruled for only eight years; in 626, his ambitious second son, Li Shimin, forced his father to abdicate and claimed the throne himself. Once in control of the dynasty and ruling under the imperial name Tang Taizong, the new emperor vigorously and successfully directed China's fortunes for the next quarter century.
- With the assistance of brilliant Confucian advisers, such as Wei Zheng, the Tang was another of the dynasties that represent the

triumph of Confucianism. Taizong embarked on a series of much needed political reforms.

- He was determined to address internal government problems, including how to administer a large imperial structure, how to improve infrastructure to aid communications, and how to solve the problems of land ownership and taxation.
- To oversee these reforms, he created three separate ministries in his administration: one to draft, one to review, and a third to implement government policies. Nothing in previous government experiments even came close to the sophistication of Tang administration.

Tang Administrative Reforms

- Initially, Taizong had to deal with powerful regional aristocracies, but the administrative reforms he put in place meant that by its mature period, Tang government was able to shake off regionalism and become highly centralized. The Tang bureaucracy was organized into a system of specialized councils, boards, and ministries. Local government was managed by 15 provincial governors, and there were military commanders in each province who collected state tribute, thus ensuring that the governors could not use their positions to enrich themselves.
- As had been the case during the Han dynasty, it was critical to staff this large and complex bureaucracy with officials who were deeply imbued with Confucian ideals of ethical behavior, filial piety, and loyalty to the state.
 - The Sui had reintroduced written examinations for government candidates based on their knowledge of the Confucian classics. The Tang expanded this system by establishing state schools and issuing standard, authorized versions of the classics to be taught in these schools.
 - Although only 30 or so men passed the rigorous final imperial exam each year, a core of elite, brilliant, and ethical officials was gradually built up within government. Higher positions

were also opened up to men of lowly rank who possessed genuine talent at administration.

- This system for recruiting only the most talented men into the civil service worked so well that it remained essentially intact for the next 1,300 years, disappearing only after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in the 20th century.
- Armed with this corps of capable officials, the government was able to turn to the critical problems of administration that had plagued all previous dynasties.
 - Throughout its reign, the Tang worked hard to construct and maintain an extensive communications network to facilitate trade and the movement of armies and to help unify what had for so long been a fragmented China. The transport system relied on well-constructed roads and canals, a horse courier system, and teams of fast human runners.
 - The Tang continued and improved the equal-field system to ensure equitable distribution of land and avoid the concentration of property that had caused problems under the later Han. The system worked well initially, but in the early 8th century, it began showing signs of strain.

Empress Wu (624–705 C.E.)

- Emperor Taizong's ninth son became Emperor Gaozong, who reigned from 650 to 683 C.E. Gaozong's rule was marked not just by solid government but also by the rise to power of one of the most extraordinary women in the long history of Eastern civilization: Wu Zetian.
- Originally an adolescent concubine to the emperor, Wu Zetian gained influence over Gaozong and convinced him to oust the legitimate empress and install Wu in her place. As empress, she used brutal tactics, including murder and exile, to eliminate all opposition. When the emperor suffered a stroke in 660, Empress Wu moved swiftly to take complete charge of Tang China.

- After the emperor died in 683, Wu maintained control through her two sons before proclaiming herself empress of China in 690 C.E. For the next 15 years, she proved herself an effective ruler. She weakened the power of the aristocracy by physically removing many of them from court, and she strengthened the examination system by recruiting more men of merit from all ranks. In foreign affairs, she attacked and defeated Korea!
- In 705, Wu was forced to abdicate, and the Tang dynasty was restored by her son Zhongzong. Although later Chinese historians have been hostile toward her because of her ruthlessness, Wu remains one of the most extraordinary women in the history of East Asia.

Eurasian Political Situation

- During the first decades of Tang rule, a large area of Central Asia was under the control of the last great Persian empire of the Sasanians, but with the rise of Islam, the Sasanians were destroyed in the early 7th century.
- Most of western Inner Asia, not to mention the Middle East and North Africa, soon become part of the great Islamic caliphates of the Umayyad dynasty, which ruled from Damascus between 661 and 750 C.E., and their successors, the Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from Baghdad from 750 to 1258 C.E.
- Along with a powerful and restive Tibet to the southwest and an increasingly troublesome Turkic-speaking nomadic empire emerging in the northwest, this was the geopolitical situation facing the expansionary Tang dynasty.

Tang Foreign Relations

- Soon after it was established, the powerful Tang military began to flex its muscles.
 - Turning first to the north, Tang forces quickly brought Manchuria under Chinese control and then forced the Silla kingdom in Korea to acknowledge Tang hegemony.

- Turning south, the Tang conquered the northern part of Vietnam. Next, Tang armies were dispatched west along the old Silk Roads, where they established a strong Chinese presence deep in Central Asia, as far west as the Aral Sea.
- As part of this move into Central Asia, Tang forces also headed southwest, into the forbidding landscape of Tibet, to bring the dangerous Tibetan forces under their control.
- To help control what was now the largest Chinese empire that had ever existed, the Tang revived the old Han dynasty tributary system and began to promote a new theory about China's place in the world: China was the Middle Kingdom of the earth, with responsibility for bringing order to subordinate lands through a system of tributary relationships.
 - As neighboring lands recognized the Middle Kingdom's power and role, they were expected to bring gifts and tribute to the court and to prostrate themselves before the emperor.
 - In return, tributary states had their authority recognized and received lavish gifts from the Tang, usually far more valuable than the tribute they had brought to the court.



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Under the Tang, foreign fashions in hair and clothing were copied, and foreign amusements, such as polo, became pastimes of the wealthy.

- This institutionalizing of relations between China and its neighbors had important implications for trade and stability across much of the Eastern Hemisphere.
 - With Tang China now in control of an enormous Eurasian empire and at the center of a complex system of tributary and exchange relationships, Silk Roads trade revived; indeed, the era of Tang rule is widely recognized as the second great Silk Roads era. Goods from distant regions flooded into Tang China.
 - Foreign religions, including Islam, Judaism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorian Christianity, also traveled along the roads and were practiced by thousands of foreign merchants who took up residence in Tang China. Although all these religions were tolerated and even appreciated by the elites, none of them penetrated into the Chinese population in the way Buddhism had done several centuries earlier.
- Eventually, the Tang overreached itself in its relentless expansion westward, coming up against an equally determined and expansionist Muslim world. The result was a conflict known as the Battle of Talas, an indecisive and scrappy encounter in 751 C.E. between forces of the Islamic Abbasid caliphate and the Tang dynasty, essentially for control of Central Asia. The Chinese army was eventually defeated, losing the opportunity for lasting Chinese influence in the region.

Chinese Economy under the Tang

- The surging economy of China under the Tang was a product of the dynasty's successful internal and external administrative policies. In an idea borrowed from previous Chinese dynasties, the Tang government paid for much of its expansion by monopolizing the salt, liquor, and tea industries.
- With enormous demand for Chinese products stimulated by Silk Roads trade, such crafts as papermaking, iron casting, porcelain, and silk processing flourished. Much of this trade took place by sea, as well as by land.

- Inside Tang China, economic development of the south was aided by convenient water transportation along rivers and streams. River traffic grew so heavy that storms at Yangzhou in 721 and again in 751 led to the destruction of more than 1,000 commercial boats each time.
- The southern port cities of Canton, Quanzhou, and Fuzhou grew in size as maritime trade along the coast and throughout Southeast Asia expanded greatly, much of it in the hands of Arab merchants.
- By 742, China was experiencing massive population growth, with the economy surging internally and externally and with Tang armies trampling over half of the Eurasian continent. We'll pick up the story in the next lecture with the Tang at the height of its success and brilliance.

Suggested Reading

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 5.

Wright and Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the Tang*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the Tang create and manage such a powerful and successful imperial state?
2. Who was the extraordinary Empress Wu, and how did she become the only woman ever to rule China?

Changan and the Glittering Tang

Lecture 22

In this second lecture on one of China's greatest dynasties and the contributions it made to Eastern civilization, we will focus on life during the High Tang period, when the dynasty was at the peak of its power and wealth. In particular, we'll visit the court of Emperor Xuanzong, who reigned for more than 40 years, between 713 and 756 C.E. The emperor is also known as Minghuang, which means "brilliant emperor," a reflection not so much of his intelligence but of the splendid and glittering court he kept. In addition to high culture, we will also explore the fortunes of Buddhism in the Tang, the dynasty's literature, and attitudes toward women.

The City of Changan

- Even before the Tang came to power, Changan had been one of the great imperial capitals of China for more than 2,000 years. It was the capital city of the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties, the Qin and early Han, and many others during the Age of Disunity. But it was under the Tang that Changan became the most splendid city in the world!
- Changan was a superbly planned metropolis laid out on a grid 30 miles square, one of four Tang cities that had populations in excess of 1 million. Changan was also home to another million who lived in the "suburbs" just beyond the city walls.
- The city was surrounded by outer walls made of pounded earth, 15 feet thick and 35 feet tall, which extended more than five miles north to south and nearly six miles east to west. In accordance with tradition, the emperor's palace was located in the north so that the emperor always faced south, toward his subjects.
- Large numbers of foreigners visited or lived in Changan, including Buddhist pilgrims from India; Korean students of the imperial

Confucian academy; and of course, Persian, Syrian, Sogdian, and Arab merchants.

- With a large population of foreign visitors, Changan was one of the world's most diverse religious centers. It was home to Daoist temples; Buddhist stupas; a mosque; and churches of the Manichaean, Zoroastrian, and Nestorian Christian faiths.
- Confucian scholar-bureaucrats and their families lived in lavish mansions near the administrative city and imperial complex.

The High Tang

- The high point of the Tang arrived in the first half of the 8th century, during the 44-year reign of Xuanzong, whose court was arguably the most fashionable and cultured in the world. Xuanzong conducted state ceremonies on a grand scale, both inside the palace and in the nearby Hibiscus Garden and Purple Cloud Pavilion. Ritual had long been a critical aspect of Chinese civilization, and Xuanzong oversaw a great codification of state-sponsored rituals.
- Government service attracted elite scholars, but so, too, did the arts. The Tang Confucian system focused on the finest traditions of a liberal education, on creating men who were skilled at philosophy and calligraphy, oratory and music, mathematics and dancing, and visual and literary art.
 - For example, every educated man in the emperor's court would be expected to write an occasional poem, and poetic composition became one of the skills tested in the most prestigious of the civil service examinations.
 - To continually improve the quality of the poetry written in his court, Emperor Xuanzong established an academy for poets in Changan, in which the great poet Li Bai served.

- Xuanzong also enjoyed music and dance, and in keeping with a long imperial obsession that emerged particularly under the Han Wudi, he had a love of horses.
- In reflecting the tolerant and cosmopolitan nature of Tang society generally, Buddhist and Daoist clerics were equally welcome at court. We know, for example, that Xuanzong invited teachers of the new Tantric school of Buddhism to visit the court in 726, when he called upon the Javanese monk Vajrabodhi to perform Tantric rites to avert drought.
 - The first great emperor of the Tang dynasty, Taizong, had been fascinated by the monk Xuanzang, who had undertaken a long and harrowing journey from China through Central Asia and India between 645 and 660. During this 15-year trip, he studied with many great Buddhist masters.
 - When he returned to China, Xuanzang brought with him some 657 Sanskrit texts, which he was determined to translate into Chinese. With the emperor's support, he set up a large translation bureau at the Great Goose Pagoda in Changan. By the end of his life, Xuanzang was credited with the translation of 1,330 lengthy Buddhist scriptures.
 - Xuanzang's epic journey later became the inspiration for one of the most beloved novels in East Asian history, *Journey to the West*, written during the Ming dynasty.

Tang Poetry and Music

- It was during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong that many of China's most revered poets were active; even today, more than 48,900 poems written by 2,200 named Tang poets have survived. One of the reasons both for this proliferation of poetry writing and for the survival of so many Tang poems is technological. By the time of the Tang, papermaking had reached great levels of sophistication, and printing was done with carved, fixed blocks of wood.

“Drinking Alone by Moonlight”

Li Bai

A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
I drink alone, for no friend is near.
Raising my cup I beckon the bright moon,
For he, with my shadow, will make three men.
The moon, alas, is no drinker of wine;
Listless, my shadow creeps about at my side.
Yet with the moon as friend and the shadow as slave
I must make merry before the Spring is spent.
To the songs I sing the moon flickers her beams;
In the dance I weave my shadow tangles and breaks.
While we were sober, three shared the fun;
Now we are drunk, each goes his way.
May we long share our odd, inanimate feast,
And meet at last on the Cloudy River of the sky.

- Tang poetry achieved its greatest heights with the poets Li Bai (701–763) and Du Fu (712–770). Although the two poets were friends and colleagues, their approach to their craft differed considerably.
 - Li Bai loved mountains and wine. According to legend, during a drinking party, he leaned out of a boat to scoop the moon out of the water, fell in, and drowned!

“Facing Snow”

Du Fu

After the battle, many new ghosts cry,
The solitary old man worries and grieves.
Ragged clouds are low amid the dusk,
Snow dances quickly in the whirling wind.
The ladles cast aside, the cup not green,
The stove still looks as if a fiery red.
To many places communications are broken,
I sit, but cannot read my books for grief.

- Du Fu was the more serious of the two, well known for his social conscience and biting sociopolitical commentary.
- In Xuanzong's court, beautiful courtesans played an increasingly important part in popularizing a new verse form by singing lyrics written by famous men and by composing lyrics and musical accompaniment themselves. Some of these female composer-poets achieved great renown, particularly the beautiful and talented lyric poet Li Qingzhao.

Status of Women in Tang China

- The status of women in Tang China was enigmatic to say the least. On the one hand, we know that talented courtesans were deeply respected by court elites and Confucian scholars and that the only woman ever to rule China did so during the Tang. On the other hand, legal codes introduced by the first Tang emperor contained severe penalties for wives who disobeyed or were unfaithful to their husbands.
- To add to this confusing picture of Tang dynasty women, the literature of the period often depicts active, strong women fighting against convention, but in the end, they all seem to want to go back to being dutiful Confucian women. The most famous example of this is "The Ballad of Mulan," probably composed a century or so before the Tang came to power.
 - "The Ballad of Mulan" tells in lilting verse the story of a loyal daughter who dresses as a man and goes off to war to save her elderly father from conscription.
 - After 12 years of successful fighting against the nomads in the north, she returns to her village and changes back into a woman, astonishing her soldier companions.
 - This seems to suggest that she has courage and initiative and can certainly master the world of men, but ultimately, all she really wants to do is be a dutiful Confucian daughter.

The End of the Tang

- During the last decade of his reign, the old emperor lost interest in government and was increasingly distracted by the charms of his concubine Yang Guifei, who is regarded as one of the Four Beauties in Chinese history.
 - Yang Guifei left her husband (the emperor's son) to become the concubine of the old emperor himself and, thus, rose to a position of great power in the court.
 - Later, Yang Guifei got caught up in a dangerous rebellion against the emperor, and the people demanded her execution.
 - The emperor could only watch her hang and was so distressed that he abdicated soon after and spent the rest of his life lamenting her loss.
- The rebellion that cost Yang Guifei her life was led by career soldier An Lushan, who had become an adviser to Xuanzong. The rebellion lasted from 755 to 763, although An Lushan himself was assassinated in 757. Rebel troops numbering 200,000 seized all the imperial capital cities, and the emperor was forced to flee to Sichuan.
- Although the Tang held on to power for another 150 years, the rebellion of An Lushan weakened the government. Many regions withdrew from the empire, and central power fell into the hands of court eunuchs.
 - The equal-field system collapsed, and many peasants became bonded serf laborers to the wealthy landlords.
 - The old taxation system also fell apart, although in the reign of Dezong (r. 779–805), it was replaced by a new system that became the basis of tax collection in China for the next 800 years.
- The Tang's tolerance of other religions also declined in the last century of its existence.

- Pro-Daoist Emperor Wuzong began a series of persecutions against Buddhists; records show that 4,600 Buddhist monasteries and 40,000 temples were destroyed in the mayhem.
- Daoists and others increasingly attacked Buddhism as a “foreign” ideology that subverted traditional Chinese values; Buddhism in China would never be the same again.
- During the last half-century of the dynasty, conflict and mistrust between court officials and military commanders in the field paralyzed the government. Rebellions toward the end of the 9th century destroyed several cities. Restive Turks appeared on the northern borders, although they tended to side with the Tang rulers, and their interventions may actually have saved the dynasty from destruction several times.
- The Tang dynasty finally ended in the year 907 when one of the regional military governors deposed the last emperor and took the throne for himself, beginning a new era that historians call the Five Dynasties Period.
- As we will see later, although division returned to China after the fall of the Tang, this fragmentation was short-lived. The Song dynasty came to power a mere 50 years later and built on the achievements of the Tang to turn China into the economic powerhouse of the world. Indeed, the Song initiated an industrial revolution that, had it been sustained, would have dramatically altered the subsequent course of global history.

Suggested Reading

Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*.

Song Nan Zhang, *The Ballad of Mulan*.

Wriggins, *The Silk Road Journey with Xuanzang*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was the High Tang dynasty such a golden intellectual age?
2. What does “The Ballad of Mulan” tell us about the ambiguous status of women under the Tang?

Korea—Mysterious Beginnings

Lecture 23

With this lecture, we will leave China for a while to spend time in some of the other states and cultures of the Eastern Hemisphere, particularly Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. As we will see, China exercised an enormous influence—military, spiritual, and political—on the development of these neighboring societies, but despite that almost overwhelming influence, the states and peoples of Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia maintained their own distinctive identities and fascinating traditions. With this lecture, we begin a series of four on Korean history and culture, taking us from the misty origins of that society through to the tribulations it suffered after the Mongols invaded the Korean Peninsula.

Geography and Climate in Korea

- The Korean Peninsula is separated from the mainland of China by the Yellow Sea and from the islands of Japan by the Sea of Japan. It shares many characteristics of climate and coastline with both of these neighbors, but unlike its neighbors, most of Korea is extremely rugged, mountainous, and heavily forested. Thus, the first human migrants to Korea faced a host of environmental challenges but also a wide range of possible settlement sites, including coastal regions, wooded interiors, and river flats.
- On a map, the Korean Peninsula seems to extend like an inverted thumb southward from the mainland of East Asia. Today, Korea is bordered on the north by China and Russia, and in the south, the thumb points directly at the southern Japanese island of Kyushu.
- The land mass of Korea is a little more than 220,000 square kilometers, about the same size as Great Britain. The peninsula is roughly 1,000 kilometers long (600 miles) and, at its narrowest point, is no more than 200 kilometers wide (120 miles). Korea sits squarely in the temperate zone of the world.

- Geologically, Korea consists mostly of a block of ancient granite that was laid down before the Cambrian Era and tilts west, toward the Yellow Sea. Overlaying this block are younger rocks, including gneiss, more recent granites, and limestone.
 - The limestone has produced caves that were initially attractive to early human migrants, but few of these caves were the right shape or size to become practical dwellings.
 - The ancient granites contain important metals—gold, copper, tin, and iron—all of which were accessed by early governments to create lucrative industries.
- Korea has almost none of the volatile volcanic activity of its neighbor Japan. The only volcano on the Korean Peninsula is Mount Baekdu in the far north. At 2,744 meters (just over 9,000 feet), it is also the highest mountain in Korea.
 - Mount Baekdu is regarded by Koreans as sacred and the place of their ancestral origins. Many Korean states have held sacred rituals at the mountain over the centuries.



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The crater of the extinct Mount Baekdu is the site of Heaven Lake, where according to ancient legend, the gods once dwelled.

- During the Second World War, the dense forest around the mountain became a stronghold for anti-Japanese resistance fighters; communist guerillas also based themselves in the mountain's forests during the early stages of the Korean War.
- North Korean propaganda claims that the state's founder, Kim il-Sung, was one of the organizers of the Japanese resistance movement that operated at the base of the mountain and that his deceased son, Kim Jong Il, was actually born under Mount Baekdu.
- More than 70 percent of the land of Korea is covered in steep-sided mountains. Most of these mountains are less than 5,000 feet high, but their ruggedness and steepness have influenced Korean history. The major watershed of Korea runs close to the east coast and extends from north to south down the length of the peninsula.
- The shelf of flatter land along the eastern seaboard is narrow because the land drops in altitude from about 1,000 meters to sea level in just a few kilometers. This is the coastal zone, where ancient fishing villages were formed.
 - Because there are no significant bays or harbors to encourage the development of larger communities along this rugged coast, much of the political development of Korea occurred along the south and west coasts and the thousands of islands just offshore.
 - Here is where archaeologists have found much of the evidence of early human habitation, although the environment is far from perfect for humans because the adjacent and shallow Yellow Sea means that the west coast is subject to tide fluctuations of up to 10 meters, or roughly 30 feet.
- Korean rivers are also legendary and legion. All are twisted, convoluted, and relatively narrow as they cut their way down from the mountains. All the great capitals of Korea have been located along three major rivers: the Taedong (where Pyongyang lies

today), the Imjin-Han river system (where Seoul is located); and the Kum, further south.

- Korean winters are cold and dry, while summers are hot and often drenched with torrential monsoon rains. During the last ice age, sea levels were some 400 feet lower than they are today. Much of the Yellow Sea was dry land, and Korea was connected to Japan. From about 11,000 years ago, the earth entered a sustained warming trend; as a result, sea levels rose to seal off the inhabitants of Japan and separate Korea from China, except along the northern border.

Paleolithic Habitation in Korea

- As was the case with China, there is sketchy evidence to suggest that *Homo sapiens* were preceded in the region by earlier hominids. Skulls found at several cave sites appear to be those of *Homo erectus*, some of which have been dated to around 500–600,000 B.P., and were discovered along with stone tools and crude hand axes.
- In central Korea, at the Chongoni site above the Hantan River, more sophisticated hand axes and flake tools have been discovered in close proximity to the raw materials needed to produce them, suggesting that this was some sort of workshop site.
- The most important Paleolithic site of early human activity in Korea is Sokchang, located beside the Kum River in south-central Korea, where many artifacts have been discovered, including an increasingly sophisticated tool kit.
 - Some archaeologists see similarities in the tools found at Sokchang with those discovered in the Zhoukoudian Caves in China, which were occupied for long periods by hominids and Stone Age humans.
 - Six basic types of tools found at Zhoukoudian are similar to tools found from the same period at several Korean sites.

- Given that the Yellow Sea was largely dry land for much of the Paleolithic, it is not surprising that there should be similarities between Chinese and Korean Paleolithic lifeways.
- Another important Chinese Paleolithic site, at Jinniushan in the Liaodong Peninsula, also just across the Yellow Sea from Korea, has yielded flake tools and evidence of the controlled use of fire that are remarkably similar to items found at the Korean Hukwuri Cave site. Many similar tool types also appear at Paleolithic sites in Japan, which was connected by land bridges to Korea for much of this period.
- We get a glimpse at the Upper Paleolithic lifeways of humans in Korea over an enormously long period, between about 30,000 and 3,000 B.C.E., through materials found at Sokchangi and at the Sangsi Rockshelter and Yonggul Cave.
- The problem for Korean archaeologists working in the Late Paleolithic is that as the climate warmed at the end of the ice age and sea levels rose, many of the sites humans had occupied were completely submerged. Still, we know that Paleolithic humans followed foraging lifeways, which in Korea meant exploiting the plant resources of the extensive forests of the peninsula and hunting deer, wild boar, and even macaques.
- Although the Yellow Sea was a great plain during the ice age, humans probably lived mostly on the flats and visited the mountains only seasonally in search of boar, nuts, fruits, and herbs. Partly because of this, only a handful of Paleolithic shelters have been found so far in Korea.
 - Sokchangi has revealed the remains of two huts outlined by lines of stones, a hearth, and five post holes, and a dwelling unearthed at the Kulpori site seems to be the remains of a single enclosed house.

- But these dwellings are small, and even the cave sites have such restricted areas that they could have housed only small families at best.
- All this suggests that early human communities in Korea were very small; only minimal hunter-gatherer bands or perhaps extended family groups occupied these sites.

The Neolithic Age in Korea

- A series of migrations by different peoples inaugurated the Neolithic Age in Korea. Villages appear in Korea sometime after 6000 B.C. Most early village sites are located by the coast or on river terraces and feature houses that were partly subterranean and heated by central hearths. The villages were small, with just a few houses, and were strategically positioned to exploit the natural resources of the region, including fish and other seafood, as well as river and forest resources.
- These early villages appear stable, and the occupants pursued lifeways well adapted to local environments; they hunted, fished, practiced small-scale farming, and gathered forest and marine products. Society was clan-based; village life was communal and egalitarian; and the residents were probably all related to each other by blood.
- Although each village probably had some sort of a chief, important decisions would have been made by clan assemblies of elders. Some anthropologists believe that the Council of Nobles that appeared in later Korean history was an echo of these earlier institutions.
- Trying to gain a glimpse of the religious beliefs of these early communities is difficult. The few burial sites that have been found feature skeletons extended on their backs with heads in the east, accompanied by bone hair ornaments, shell necklaces, and jade rings. At other sites, pieces of smoky topaz have been found, along with some basic human figurines and simple clay masks of human faces.

- The shamanistic beliefs of early Neolithic peoples everywhere revolved around the idea that the world was full of spirits—some good, some evil—that had to be propitiated through ritual and magic.
- It was possible for the soul of a human to enter that world after death if the proper rites were observed; as we will see, these ideas led directly to the organization of complex, ritualized religious practices in the next stage of Korean history.
- This fascinating suite of beliefs, rituals, lifeways, survival strategies, and ideas about the communal relationship of families to larger organizations, such as clans—each a product of the environmental and geographic context in which they emerged—would go on to become the foundational elements of the subsequent culture and history of the Korean people.

Suggested Reading

Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, chapter 1.

Hoefer, *Insight Guides: Korea*.

Nelson, *The Archaeology of Korea*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what way has the geography of Korea influenced the way its history unfolded?
2. Despite the work of archaeologists, why is it still difficult to know how early humans lived in Korea during the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras?

Korea—The Land of Morning Calm

Lecture 24

In the last lecture, we looked at the environment of the Korean peninsula and at archaeological evidence for the earliest stages of human history there. As we saw, the small village communities of the Neolithic era eventually began to combine to form town-states. Early in the 1st millennium B.C.E., Korea entered its Bronze Age, a historical process accompanied by the emergence of powerful leaders and coercive states. In this lecture, we will follow these developments into the so-called Three Kingdoms Period, an era characterized by almost continual conflict among the kingdoms but also by the emergence of a complicated political, military, and cultural relationship with Korea's giant neighbor to the west, China.

The Mumun Period

- About 2000 B.C.E., large-scale stone tomb structures called dolmens start to appear in the Korean archaeological record. A new form of pottery—Mumun pottery—also appears during this period; this pottery became so widespread that it has given its name to this archaeological era, the Mumun Period, between about 1500 and 300 B.C.E.
- The Mumun Period is subdivided into early, middle, and late chronological and cultural periods that correspond to the appearance of increasingly complex societies.
- Sometime in the 8th century B.C.E., bronze artifacts also start to appear in the archaeological record for the first time, including ritual bells, horse bells, polished mirrors, swords, axes, and chisels.
- Archaeologists are uncertain whether all these developments—dolmens, Mumun pottery, and the appearance of bronze and other status artifacts—are products of cultural evolution within the indigenous early town-state organization or of the migrations of new peoples from the north and west into the peninsula. Archaeologists

are also uncertain about the extent to which these developments were influenced by changes in China at the same time.

- During the millennium between 2000 and 1000 B.C.E., mighty dynasties appeared in China—the Xia and the Shang. The emergence of these dynasties was accompanied by the appearance of writing, standing armies, long-distance trade, highly developed bronze metallurgy, and powerful military and political elites.
- The appearance of hierarchies and craft specialization in Korea suggest that powerful states and leaders were also emerging in Korea, perhaps as a result of political influence from across the Yellow Sea.



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The plain cooking and storage vessels that proliferated during the Mumun period are evidence of the adoption of intensive agriculture throughout the Korean peninsula.

Mumun Villages

- The arrival of Mumun pottery and bronze implements also coincides with an interesting shift in the location of Korean communities and settlements.
 - The riverbanks were abandoned during the Mumun Period, and villages were set up on hillsides and other high ground above the river valleys. This left the valleys and river flats free for farming.
 - The higher-altitude villages also increased in size, numbering anywhere from tens to hundreds of pit houses and showing evidence of successful farming, surpluses, and population increases.
- The villages were structured around a strong sense of communal life. We see this sense of community in Sinmaeri, an important late-Mumun village discovered above the North Han River in central Korea, estimated to have flourished in the 4th century B.C.E.

- Megalithic dolmen burial structures were also found near Sinmaeri. Dolmens are constructions of large, unworked stones, usually with upright stones supporting a large horizontal capping stone. The fact that some of the burials are richly furnished with pottery, bronze, and occasionally jade artifacts is further evidence for the existence of social elites.

Cultural Influences on Korea

- The Bronze Age finds in Korea bring us back to the question of the cultural influence from China on Korean societies. It is, for example, reasonable to assume that the seeds that brought rice to Korea came from China.
- We also have references in Shang dynastic sources to a people and land called the Donghu (“eastern barbarians”), which many scholars believe is a reference to the Koreans. Several of the Shang oracle bones mention battles between the Shang and the Donghu.
- Ongoing conflict with the Chinese would have become even fiercer in the mid- to late 1st millennium B.C.E., when Korea entered its Iron Age. Iron metallurgy probably also traveled into Korea from China via Manchuria and soon led to striking changes in Korean lifeways. By the 2nd century B.C.E., agriculture was boosted by the use of iron tools, and iron weapons appeared.
- Although the design of many iron products was clearly Chinese, there is also evidence of a strong influence from the steppe nomadic peoples to the north, the same restive militarized nomads, such as the Xiongnu, who caused so many problems for early Chinese dynasties.

Wiman Joseon

- The most advanced of the Korean states in the late 1st millennium B.C.E. is known as the Wiman Joseon, which combined with other walled town-states to form large state-like confederations headed by kings. This development served to bring Korea increasingly to the attention of China, particularly after the Warring States Period

of the late Zhou in China had given way to the more unified Qin and Han dynasties.

- Chinese influence on Korean politics now became direct and personal. According to Chinese sources, a Chinese general named Wiman adopted the dress and hairdo of the Koreans and moved into the Korean Peninsula with 1,000 followers around 200 B.C.E., at the very beginning of the Han dynasty in China.
 - By 198 B.C.E., Wiman had created his own state and built his capital near the present-day North Korean capital of Pyongyang.
 - This Wiman Joseon state lasted for several decades before the Han sent armies to conquer it as part of their program of imperial expansion and to seek raw resources.
 - Chinese armies besieged forts and towns of northern Korea until, eventually, the Han conquered the Wiman Joseon state and turned northern Korea into a Chinese colony, a situation that lasted for the next 400 years.
- The expansionist Han claimed a vast region of Manchuria and northern Korea and established four large commanderies to administer their new territories. Because of fierce resistance in the south, the Han were eventually forced to remove their commanderies from the southern part of the peninsula, which remained independent and was viewed as a barbaric and uncivilized region by the Chinese.
- Indeed, all the Korean territories proved difficult for the Han to govern, even with their powerful armies, well-run commanderies, and the large numbers of Chinese expatriates who moved into the region. Despite frequent rebellions, the Han managed to maintain their presence in Korea for about 400 years.
 - The administrative center of Lolang became a sophisticated Chinese city and military command post in Korea, where the Han governor and administrators lived a sumptuous Chinese lifestyle.

- The existence of the command center of Lolang was instrumental in the direct importation of many of the cultural inventions of the Chinese, including their writing, technology, and philosophies of government.
- But it must also be noted that the greatest effect of this cultural influence was localized around the former Wiman Joseon capital near Pyongyang; much of the so-called barbaric south remained culturally and politically independent of China and, to a certain extent, of Chinese culture.

The Three Kingdoms

- Late in the 1st century B.C.E., three powerful kingdoms emerged in Korea: Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla. Each kingdom developed along parallel paths of state formation and expansion and competed with the others and with the Chinese for superiority.
- After the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E., the Chinese state fragmented, entering the 350-year-long Age of Disunity. This meant that the Chinese were more focused on internal problems during this period and largely left Korea alone.
- During the Han dynasty, the Koguryo kingdom arose in the north of Korea, in a region that is now part of modern China. The kingdom's traditional founding date is 37 B.C.E., and we know that within five decades, Koguryo was strong enough to revolt against Han Chinese control of the region.
- The Paekche kingdom, with headquarters on the Han River in central Korea, was traditionally said to have been founded in 18 B.C.E. by two brothers. The Paekche went on to rule a substantial territory in the southwest of Korea, which they divided into 22 administrative districts, each controlled by a member of the royal family.
- The third kingdom, Silla, was located in the southeast and founded in 57 B.C.E. when a group of six villages joined forces and elected a paramount chief to take care of their interests. Silla was protected

from the other kingdoms and Chinese influence by rugged mountains and largely developed on its own in the far southeastern corner of the peninsula.

- Relationships among the kingdoms revolved around outright war and shifting alliances and are catalogued in early chronicles from the period.
 - In the year 313 C.E., the Koguryo under King Michon attacked and destroyed the Chinese commandery of Lolang, ending the period of Chinese colonization and bringing the boundary of Koguryo territory contiguous with that of Paekche.
 - Along the northern frontier, confrontations between Koguryo and the Chinese Northern Wei dynasty continued through the 4th century. But while Koguryo was preoccupied with the Northern Wei, Paekche was amassing power in the south, and by the late 4th century, Paekche was at war with Koguryo.
 - In 427, Koguryo moved its capital closer to Paekche and drove the Paekche court further south to the Kum River. Paekche opened negotiations with the southern Chinese Liang dynasty, searching for allies. Fifty years later, in 475 C.E., Koguryo forces drove north again, conquered the Paekche capital, and killed the king.
 - This protracted conflict between Paekche and Koguryo facilitated the growth of the isolated Silla kingdom in the southeast.
- While all this conflict was going on, Buddhism began to diffuse into Korea. Eventually, each of the kingdoms adopted Buddhism as its official state religion: Koguryo in 372, Paekche in 384, and Silla in 528. Other Chinese cultural exports, including Confucianism, court customs, and literature, also influenced the Three Kingdoms era.
- In 581 C.E., the very effective Sui dynasty came to power in China. During this period of political change, the Koguryo kingdom began

raiding the coastal regions of China, which led to reprisals from the Sui and an eventual invasion attempt led by the Sui emperor, Yangdi. The Chinese were defeated by the Koguryo general Mundok.

- Archeological evidence supplements the sources in describing these centuries of bitter conflict that characterize the Three Kingdoms era. Scores of mountain fortresses have been found up and down the length of the Korean Peninsula, while the literature of the period abounds with tales of epic campaigns and brutal warfare!
- Eventually, Silla, in alliance with the Tang dynasty, was able to unite much of the peninsula under its leadership, and the Silla dynasty went on to control Korean affairs until 935 C.E., firmly embedding a syncretic mix of both indigenous and imported Chinese beliefs and practices into the cultural psyche of the Korean people.

Suggested Reading

Barnes, *China, Korea and Japan*.

Lee, *A New History of Korea*, chapter 2.

Questions to Consider

1. What was the impact on Korean culture of the invasion and subjugation of the peninsula by the Han dynasty?
2. Why did the Three Kingdoms period in Korea degenerate into brutal warfare, and what was the impact on Korean culture?

Korea—The Unified Silla

Lecture 25

At the end of the last lecture, we saw that the Tang dynasty in China, after failing in its attempts to invade the Koguryo kingdom, decided to focus its Korean foreign policy on forging an alliance with the Silla kingdom. Eventually, the Silla, after dealing with some tricky Tang foreign policy intentions, successfully united most of the peninsula under its leadership. This unified Silla dynasty, which ruled much of Korea until 935 C.E., and its ongoing relationship with the Tang dynasty in China are the subjects of this lecture. This relationship was not only politically important for both states but also responsible for the further transmission of core Chinese civilizational ideas into Korean culture.

Silla Struggles for Control

- In the mid-7th century, the Koguryo kingdom in the north of Korea was engaged in repeated bloody conflicts with both the Sui and Tang dynasties. With its traditional foe distracted by these Chinese campaigns, the Paekche kingdom decided to attack the Silla in the south. The Silla kingdom was hard pressed to stave off the Paekche forces and sought a strategic alliance with the Chinese Tang dynasty.
- The two new allies agreed on a strategy: The Tang would join with the Silla to defeat Paekche, after which Koguryo would be attacked in a pincer movement by Tang forces from the north and Silla troops from the south.
 - Accordingly, in 660 C.E., a Tang invasion fleet landed troops near the Paekche capital, while a Silla army simultaneously attacked Paekche territory from the east. The capital of Paekche fell to the combined assault, and the Paekche kingdom was utterly defeated.
 - Over the next several years, Koguryo came under increasing pressure from Tang forces in the north and Silla forces in the south, and by 668, it had also been defeated.

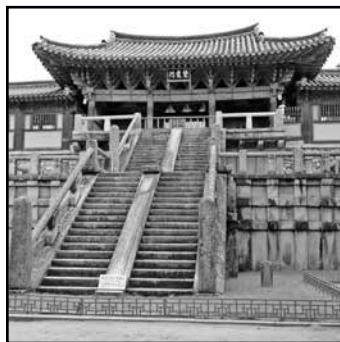
- Now the Tang dynasty revealed its true intentions: to bring the entire Korean Peninsula under Chinese imperial control by establishing powerful military commanderies throughout the region and appointing a protector general to rule all of Korea, including the Silla.
- Silla was not prepared to accept Chinese hegemony and fought back against its recent allies, repeatedly sending armies into former Koguryo and Paekche territory to defeat both revivalist forces and Tang armies. After almost a decade of struggle, Silla triumphed and, by 676, had forced the Tang to remove most of its forces and retreat. This victory over the Tang ensured that the Korean people, although heavily influenced by Chinese culture, were nonetheless able to retain their distinct cultural identity.
- Although the full name of the dynasty the Silla established is the Unified Silla, the kingdom was never able to control the entire peninsula. Émigrés from the defeated Koguryo kingdom established a new political entity they called Parhae, which gained control over much of the northern peninsula. At first, Silla attempted to bring Parhae under its control, but it eventually gave up and built a defensive wall along its northern border in the year 721.
- The relationship between China and all the Korean states remained strong, and eventually, both Silla and Parhae reconciled their differences with the Tang and went on to establish strong diplomatic and trade relations with the Chinese. In the end, both Parhae and Silla agreed to accept tributary status with the Middle Kingdom. Large-scale cultural exchange took place between Silla and Parhae and the Tang.

Silla Political Structure

- As royal authority increased under the Silla, members of what were called the “true-bone” clan lineages became the elites of Silla society. But as this elite group gained in power and prestige, the membership of the royal family came from an increasingly small section of the aristocracy.

- The exclusivity of access to the monarchy led to the undermining of claims to power from rival aristocratic families, creating an atmosphere of almost continuous tension between the ruling families and other nobles.
 - Tension existed also between the monarchy and a group of intellectuals who held the status known as “head-rank six,” a sort of scholar class that was looked down on by the true-bone families.
 - Eventually, the royal family and the head-rank six families were reconciled and agreed to work together for the success of the state, although not without periodic outbreaks of conflict.
- Most of the aristocratic true-bone families lived in the great capital called Kyongju. References in Tang sources give us some idea of the immense wealth of these aristocratic families. Archaeological excavations of Kyongju have also revealed careful city planning and many large stone buildings and beautiful gardens. As the wealth and power of the aristocracy increased, however, the lives of the common people became increasingly impoverished.
- Despite the rigidly hierarchical nature of Korean society during this period, it is worth noting that everyone who lived in Unified Silla, rich or poor, was an ardent follower of Buddhism, which dominated the intellectual and cultural life of the state. Indeed, the only real rival to Buddhism as the orthodox system of thought in Silla was Confucianism, viewed as beneficial to the effective administration of the state.
- This deep penetration of Buddhism and Confucianism in Silla government and society is further evidence of the profound influence of Chinese civilization on Korean culture. A number of Silla intellectuals were concerned about this and did what they could to prevent Korean culture from being swamped by the Tang dynasty cultural juggernaut.

- The work of scholar Kim Tae-mun, for example, constantly emphasized native Silla cultural achievements in the face of a widespread obsession with Chinese civilization.
- And Kim Tae-mun had much to celebrate, including a superb astronomical observatory constructed by Silla intellectuals in Kyongju, advanced woodblock printing used to produce Buddhist and Confucian texts, the Bulguksa temple and other Buddhist architecture, the Seokguram Grotto, and the art of bronze bell making.
- As noted earlier, throughout the entire period of Silla unified rule in the south, the northern regions of the Korean Peninsula remained under the control of the Parhae state. Where the Silla had left many traditional Three Kingdoms aristocratic administrative structures in place, the Parhae created a new system of government that was more closely modeled on that of the Chinese Tang, and the design of the Parhae capital of Sanggyong was closely modeled on the Tang capital of Changan.



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The names of various features of the Bulguksa temple—Cloud Bridge Stairway, Floating Shadow Pavilion—give some idea of the ethereal and refined nature of this complex.

Decline of the Silla

- Silla civilization reached its zenith during the reign of King Kyongdok (r. 742–765), yet the king faced renewed pressure from members of the true-bone aristocracy, who were determined to break the power of the throne and the ruling families that had dominated it for a century.
- Kyongdok tried to appease his rivals by introducing political reform based on the Tang dynasty model, but rebellion broke out and lasted

on and off for the next 20 years, until the hereditary line of Silla's ruling family had been destroyed. With the throne undermined, aristocratic families turned on each other, assembling their own personal armies.

- Records show that the late Silla period was dominated by shifting alliances of aristocratic families who seized the throne, only to become the target for new rebellions and revenge. Twenty kings ruled during the 150-year period of Silla decline, and every single reign was marked by instability and conflict.
- Unrest among intellectuals came to a head late in the 9th century after a Silla candidate, Choe Chiwon, passed the difficult Tang dynasty Confucian exam and was appointed to an important administrative position in China. This leading scholar later submitted proposals to the Silla court for political reform, but he was ignored and retired in disgust. After this snub, head-rank six scholars began to actively work against the Silla government.
- At the same time, the struggle between the aristocratic clans abated somewhat in the mid-9th century, as certain powerful families gave up their aspirations for the throne and began to focus on getting rich through trade. These families dominated the maritime shipping lanes of the region and established themselves at the center of a flourishing trade system that connected Japan, Korea, and Tang China.
- As political rivalry flared up again late in the 9th century, powerful families abandoned the capital and set themselves up in fortified compounds near major population centers. They became known as castle lords and exercised authority over their own private armies, as well as the regions and peasants around their castles, in a manner similar to the nobles who would later operate in feudal Europe. This situation further weakened the central authority of the Silla kings and made it impossible for them to collect taxes.

- Peasants abandoned their farms in large numbers and wandered the land as rebels. Large-scale peasant revolts broke out in 889, which the government forces found difficult to put down.
- Three powerful castle lords emerged to take control of competing rebel forces, setting in motion a three-cornered contest for mastery of the Korean Peninsula.
 - One lord, Kyonhwon, sacked the Silla capital in 927 and killed the king, but the other two, Wang Kon and Kungye, prevented him from toppling the Silla state. Kungye was later killed by his own people, which meant that now there were just two lords competing for power.
 - Wang Kon, who came from a noble family in the northern Kaesong region, considered himself to be a successor of the old Koguryo kingdom and came up with a new name for the state he wished to construct to replace Silla: the Koryo.
 - Wang Kon built strong alliances with other northern nobility and shrewdly pursued a policy of friendship with the Silla king, partly to forge an alliance that would allow him to defeat his rival, Kyonhwon. In the end, Wang Kon's army crushed the army of Kyonwhon in 934 C.E.
- At about the same time, the Parhae kingdom in the north was defeated by militarized nomads out of Manchuria, and members of the Parhae ruling class fled to the new state of Koryo, where they received a warm welcome from Wang Kon. One year later, in 935 C.E., the last Silla king abdicated, allowing Wang Kon to quickly achieve complete reunification of the Korean Peninsula under his rule. Wang Kon (who is known today as King Taejo) now officially named this new era the Koryo dynasty; it would go on to rule for nearly 500 years.

Suggested Reading

Henthorn, *A History of Korea*.

Joe, *Traditional Korea*.

Questions to Consider

1. How were Buddhism and Confucianism reconciled to become the foundational ideologies of Korean civilization?
2. What internal and external tensions led eventually to the collapse of the Silla?

Korea—The Koryo

Lecture 26

As we saw in our last lecture, after the victory of Wang Kon over his rival Kyonhwon, the tide of battle turned in Koryo's favor, and in the year 935 C.E., the last king of Silla abdicated in favor of Wang Kon. At about the same time, the Parhae kingdom in the north was overrun by nomads, and Wang Kon welcomed the evicted Parhae nobility into his court, bringing about the complete unification of the Korean Peninsula under one government for the first time in its history. The Koryo would go on to rule unified Korea for the next 500 years. In this lecture, we'll look at the Koryo, its government, culture, society, and bitter struggle with the Mongols.

Consolidation of Koryo Power

- After the abdication of the last king of Silla, King Taejo (Wang Kon's posthumous reign name) attempted to unite the disparate nobles whose fragmentation had so blighted the late Silla period. He treated the Silla nobility with great generosity and invited many nobles into the Koryo bureaucracy. Despite these overtures, many of the regional castle lords maintained their independent status and rejected attempts by the Koryo government to control them.
- The king attempted to placate and control these lords by establishing marriage ties with more than 20 noble families and bestowing on them the royal family name. But by the time Taejo died from disease in 943, political consolidation was far from complete.
- In the end, it was the reforms of Kwangjong, the fourth king of the Koryo (r. 949–975), that finally consolidated Koryo central rule and crushed the power of the landed nobility. The elite military and political figures who had helped in the founding of the Koryo state were incensed by these reforms and resisted strongly. In response, Kwangjong instituted a brutal purge of dissenters. The opposition was crushed, and the Koryo were able to assert their royal authority over the entire peninsula.

Political Ideologies

- In the age of authoritarian rule that followed the purges, Confucianism became even more widely accepted as the best system to ensure ethical government. Confucian scholars provided the new political orthodoxy of the Koryo as they deepened their control of the state.
- At the same time that Confucianism was becoming more entrenched in government, a new trend in Buddhism was also gaining popularity: Son or Zen Buddhism, which emphasized enlightenment through meditation rather than the written word.
- Another intriguing ideology that emerged early in the Koryo period was a particular form of geomancy first introduced in Korea by a monk called Toson. Toson argued that the natural features of a land area influenced whether the family living in that area would enjoy prosperity or decay. Because of Toson's influence, it became critically important for Koryo families to select propitious sites for building, particularly for family dwellings and tombs.
- After King Kwangjong's death, many of his reforms lapsed, and Confucian scholars of the Silla's old head-rank six lineages became increasingly powerful. Members of this class detested strong central monarchy and were determined to create a genuine Confucian-style society that would control the political process.
- Rather than opposing this powerful group, King Songjong (r. 981–997) worked closely with the Confucian scholars and, by doing so, helped to reestablish the foundations for Koryo's social order.

Koryo Political Structures

- Aristocratic Koryo government was reorganized around three ministries, two responsible for making policy decisions and one for carrying out directives and handling day-to-day administration. The highest officials in the land met in joint sessions of the privy council, and a powerful censorate was installed to scrutinize officials for wrongdoing.

- The state of Koryo was initially divided into 12 provinces, but by 1018, the provincial system was more sophisticated. The entire country was divided into a capital region, several large circuits, and border regions. Administration of this complex structure was handled by a mix of local officials and powerful government ministers in the capital. To establish a pool of educated and ethical men for government service, Koryo established the Kukchagam, a national university, in 992.
- The Koryo administration also focused on land reform, articulating an underlying premise that all land in the country essentially belonged to the king. However, the government distinguished between public land (managed directly by the state) and private land (held by individuals and families, often in perpetuity), which meant in theory that the wealth of both the government and the aristocracy grew.
- In a social land structure very different from that pursued by Chinese dynasties, freeborn peasant farmers were not eligible to receive land allocations from the state but could farm public land if they paid 25 percent of their output in taxes. Farmers working on private land had to pay 50 percent of their yield to the noble families that “owned” the land. Below the freeborn farmers in this hierarchical society were low-born peasants, slaves, and outcasts.

Koryo Foreign Relations

- Before his death, the Koryo founder, Taejo, had sought to extend the northern borders into the territories that had once been controlled by the Koguryo kingdom. His successors continued this effort, establishing forts across the north and pushing toward the Yalu River.
- These efforts brought Koryo into conflict with the militarized Khitan nomads, the same people who had conquered the Parhae state. Koryo’s other great northern foe was the Jurchen nomads, who dwelt further east in Manchuria. Wary of constant harassing attacks from these fierce nomadic peoples, the Koryo decided to build their own “Great Wall” across the northern frontier.



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Official records state that more than 300,000 laborers were employed for 11 years to build Korea's "Great Wall," a massive rampart across the northern frontier.

- The Jurchen then entered into a trade relationship with the Koryo, supplying horses and furs for Koryo salt and iron weapons. But under new leadership, the Jurchen began raiding the Koryo again; their nomadic horsemen easily surmounted the wall and defeated the Koryo standing armies.
- The Koryo responded by creating a new military force—the Extraordinary Military Corps—which, in 1107, drove the Jurchen back to the steppes and built nine new forts in the northeast to contain them.

Koryo Cultural Achievements

- Throughout all these tribulations, the Koryo state remained committed to rule by ethical civilian officials, which meant that Confucianism was the orthodox philosophy of the Koryo. Because of the aristocratic nature of Koryo society, however, it was the sons of the aristocracy who were groomed to pass the Confucian exams and rule the state.

- The individual spiritual philosophy of Buddhism also thrived in elite circles. Koryo Buddhism was focused on using the technology of woodblock printing to create translations of the Buddhist canon. Buddhist temples and monasteries proliferated, and enormous state Buddhist festivals were held throughout the year.
- The crowning glory of Koryo artistic achievement was celadon ceramics. Koryo celadon was particularly notable for its gorgeous jade-green colors and for the variety of extraordinary shapes produced.

Cultural Disruption

- Inevitably, this refined, aristocratic world of privilege and aesthetic appreciation was severely disrupted, first by power struggles in the great hereditary houses and then by a revolt led by a Buddhist monk.
 - The third and most serious disruption came in 1170, when a military revolt broke out against high-handed civilian officials. After the massacre of countless government officials, the rule of the state passed into the hands of the military, but its attempt to govern through a supreme council quickly broke down, leaving political and social chaos in its wake.
 - A powerful general put an end to the chaos by establishing a personal dictatorship, leaving the Wang family on the throne but deposing any kings who would not obey him.
 - Then peasant revolts broke out across the country, the worst in 1193, when 7,000 rebels were slaughtered in battle with the military, and again in 1198, when the entire slave population of the capital was in turmoil.
- In the midst of this chaos, with the foundations of Koryo society having been shaken to the core, the Mongols appeared! The Mongols were pastoral nomadic peoples who dwelt in the steppes of Central Asia. In the early 13th century, under the leader Chinggis Khan, they began a series of expansionary campaigns into China and much of Inner Asia.

- The first contact between Mongols and Koryo took place when they formed an alliance to destroy a Khitan army that had crossed the Yalu to escape the Mongols. The Mongols then demanded tribute from Koryo, but the Koreans refused, and after a Mongol envoy was killed returning from Koryo in 1225, the Mongols prepared to invade.
- In 1231, the Mongols overcame stubborn Koryo resistance and pressed toward the capital. When the Koryo sued for peace, the Mongols left military commanders in charge and agreed to withdraw their troops. But a Koryo military dictator then decided to resist the Mongols; he withdrew his forces and government to Kanghwa Island in 1232 to exploit the Mongols' only real weakness: an irrational fear of the sea.
- Frustrated, the Mongols instituted a scorched-earth policy on the mainland, burning the grain fields and capturing mountain fortresses. In one invasion alone in 1254, the Mongols took 200,000 captives, left countless dead, and reduced huge areas of Korea to ashes.
- Over the next decade, peace overtures to the Mongols were gradually accepted. The Mongols, who in the meantime had subdued China and declared the Yuan dynasty in 1271, then sought Koryo assistance for their attempted invasions of Japan.
- The Mongol rulers of China, who respected the resistance of the Koryo military, placed some regions of Korea under their direct control but left others under the rule of Koryo officials. But Mongol levies of gold, silver, cloth, grain, falcons, and young women devastated a nation already weakened by 30 years of resistance.
- In the mid-14th century, the tide turned against the Mongols. As the Ming dynasty arose in China and began to drive the Mongols back to the steppes, the Koryo king Kongmin decided to oppose the Mongols and to destroy the power of the families who had worked with them.

- The last years of the Koryo were chaotic. The king was assassinated, peasant revolts broke out again, and Japanese pirates raided the Koryo coast at will. In 1392, the last Koryo king was overthrown, and the Choson dynasty was established. The Choson would rule Korea down to 1910, when Korea was annexed by the rising power of Japan.

Suggested Reading

Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, chapter 1.

Lee, *A New History of Korea*, chapters 5–6.

Questions to Consider

1. What was the philosophy of geomancy, and why did it become so widespread in Korea during the Koryo period?
2. What were some of the most significant political and cultural achievements during the mature period of the Koryo, and how do these still resonate in Korean society today?

Japan—Geography and Early Cultures

Lecture 27

In the next four lectures, we will discuss early Japanese culture and history, beginning with the environmental context in which Paleolithic humans first settled the islands, then moving through the Neolithic, Yamatai, Nara, and Heian periods, up to the transformation of Japan from an imperial to a feudal society late in the 12th century. We will explore the interplay of local and imported cultural influences in early Japanese societies. As was the case with Korea, Japanese culture was deeply influenced by Chinese cultural prototypes, but Japan, too, became much more than just a carbon copy of China. Instead, sealed off from the East Asian mainland by geographical barriers, the inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago developed their own unique traditions.

Geography and Climate of Japan

- Modern Japan consists of four large islands (from north to south, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) and hundreds of smaller ones. This archipelago is some 1,500 miles long, and stretches from the cool northern latitudes off the coast of Russia to warmer southern latitudes off the coast of South Korea.
- The climate varies considerably throughout the archipelago, but most of the major cities, including Tokyo, have climates ranging from temperate to subtropical, with four distinct seasons.
- The fact that the many islands of Japan are separated from the mainland by several hundred miles of sea water has fostered a sense of security and isolation that helps explain the emergence of a distinct Japanese culture. This isolation also helps explain why, unlike Korea, the Chinese never invaded Japan and why the Mongols were unsuccessful in their invasions.
- Japan is actually part of a huge chain of islands located along the northwest edge of the Pacific that stretches from the Aleutian

Islands in the north to the Philippines in the south. This extensive island chain is the product of, and still heavily influenced by, tectonic forces.

- Because Japan sits at the intersection of four tectonic plates, it has undergone regular and violent geological shaping and upheaval.
 - Most of Japan consists of geologically young mountains, driven up by plate collisions. These mountains are steep, jagged, and rugged, producing fast-moving streams and regular landslides.
 - The tectonic forces have also produced volcanoes, the highest and most famous of which is Mount Fuji at 12,388 feet.
- These rugged and unstable mountain ranges are unsuitable for farming, limit settlement patterns, and are difficult to climb or cross. They have been serious barriers for internal transportation and communication from the beginning of Japanese history. This situation, in turn, led to the emergence of regionally autonomous states in early Japanese history and to an increased reliance on water transport systems.
 - The sediment regularly washed from the mountains joins with rich volcanic soil to create narrow but fertile coastal plains. These plains are where the first farmers settled and where the first towns and cities were built.



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Japan's steep, rugged mountains are the result of its location at the intersection of four tectonic plates.

- Japan's location between the great mainland continent of Asia and the Pacific also creates a distinctive and challenging weather environment, with large quantities of snow in some areas in the winter and high temperatures and torrential rains in the summer. These wind and weather systems powerfully influenced settlement patterns.
- The combination of plentiful fresh water and a long growing season created a paradise for plants and herbivores in some regions. These conditions also meant that when foraging humans first arrived on the archipelago, they found a rich variety of potential foodstuffs awaiting them.

The Paleolithic Era in Japan

- The archipelago was linked to the mainland by land bridges during long periods of the geological past, and across these land bridges, the first human migrants came to Japan, beginning at least 35,000 years ago. The Paleolithic lifeways these early communities pursued mark the beginning of the development of Japanese history and culture.
- Two Japanese archaeological sites—Hoshino and Sozudai—have yielded the oldest manufactured implements found, including choppers, picks, and basic hand axes. Dating of volcanic ash and other materials found at the sites indicates that they were occupied perhaps 400,000 to 200,000 years ago.
- A much more recent Japanese site is Zazaragi, which has yielded stone tools that have been dated to roughly 40,000 years ago; these stone points and scrapers must have been manufactured by modern humans.
- These dates for the colonization of Japan correspond with key developments during the last ice age.
 - As we discussed earlier, conditions across East Asia at the height of the last ice age were bitterly cold, and sea levels were much lower. The Yellow Sea was a dry plain, and even

the Sea of Japan was just a large lake that drained through the present Korea Strait. These larger areas of dry land facilitated the movement of plants, animals, and humans between parts of East Asia that are now underwater.

- The arrival of humans perhaps 35,000 years ago in what is now the Japanese archipelago probably corresponded to the migrations of megafauna.
- Hanaizumi, at the northern tip of Honshu Island, is one of the few sites to provide us with a glimpse of Paleolithic lifeways. Stone and bone tools, along with animal bones found here, have led researchers to believe that it was probably a kill site or bone dump, rather than a residential camp.
- Archaeologists divide the Late Paleolithic era in Japan (beginning 30,000 years ago) into four phases, each characterized by different stone technologies. In phase I, humans used long flakes for tools; in phase II, true blades; in phase III (after 17,000 B.P.), microblades; and in phase IV, arrowheads and spearheads.
- It is also during the Late Paleolithic that we start to find evidence of humans using art as a form of self and communal expression. Stones shaped like humans have been found in Japan dating to the Late Paleolithic, and at the Iwato site, a face sculpture pecked into the hilt of a stone tool was found, dated to somewhere between 20,000 and 10,000 years ago.

The Jomon Era

- At the very end of the Paleolithic, human communities in Japan began to make some of the world's earliest known ceramics, the so-called Jomon pottery, which gave rise to a new era in Japanese history, called the Jomon era.
 - Initial evidence of this extraordinary pottery came from the Fukui and Kamikuroiwa cave sites, where pottery shards dating to around 12,000 years ago were discovered. More recent discoveries have pushed these dates back by another 2,000 years.

- As was the case with new ceramic developments in Korea, archaeologists are uncertain whether this technological innovation was indigenous or influenced by new arrivals from northeast Asia.
- The appearance of this pottery might also be linked to global climate change, specifically, the availability of more plentiful foodstuffs at the end of the last ice age. Humans invented new technologies and strategies to exploit these resources, including arrows, pit traps, fishing hooks and nets with sinkers, harpoons, and canoes; of course, they needed pottery vessels to store and carry food.
- Although the term “Jomon culture” is used to describe most of the 10,000 years that preceded the B.C.E./C.E. divide, because of environmental differences, Japanese Neolithic lifeways were far from uniform. Even the pottery shows considerable variation, and considerable trading of pottery and other valuable objects took place within and between individual islands.
- Although the original impetus for this technological innovation was probably the need for vessels to store foods, many of the more elaborate pieces of Jomon pottery appear to have been manufactured for use in religious or shamanistic rituals, probably related to fertility and seasonal regeneration, as well as human reproduction. Once agriculture was introduced and communities became dependent on successful harvests, the earlier interest in the magical qualities of seasonal regeneration and human reproduction became even more important.
- With so many resources available to these “affluent foragers,” there was no rush to adopt farming; it was eventually forced on sedentary foraging communities through population increases.
 - By the late Jomon period (from roughly 5000 B.C.E.), evidence of agriculture begins to appear in the archaeological record in the form of farming tools and the remains of major grain crops found in ancient pottery.

- From around the same period, we also have evidence that full-scale villages were starting to appear, consisting mostly of pit dwellings with roofs made of wood, thatch, or earth.
- All these processes of lifeway and technological evolution led to periods of enhanced cultural activity, particularly in central Honshu, after 3000 B.C.E.

The Yayoi Culture

- During the 1st millennium B.C.E., strikingly new technologies begin to appear in the Japanese archaeological record: new pottery, technologies, and lifeways known collectively today as the Yayoi culture.
- The Yayoi people are associated with complex technologies, such as bronze and iron metallurgy; glassmaking; weaving; and advanced agricultural techniques, including horticulture, slash-and-burn, and wet-rice farming.
- The transition from Jomon to Yayoi was gradual but nonetheless dramatic. It has been described by archaeologist Gina Barnes as “not just a change in subsistence pattern but an entire restructuring of the material economy of the Japanese islands.”
- Most Yayoi evidence comes from Kyushu and corresponds to similar complex changes that were occurring in the Korean Peninsula at the same time; the direction of cultural influence is from Korea to Japan.
- Excavations in western Japan have suggested that the Jomon and Yayoi people were, in fact, two distinctly different groups of humans. Jomon people were shorter, more robust, and round-faced; Yayoi were taller, gracile, and long-faced—strong evidence that the Yayoi people were most probably immigrants from Korea.
- The Yayoi brought with them new pottery styles and wet-rice agriculture, which led to a population boom on the plains of northern

Kyushu. Both the Yayoi people and their lifeways then expanded explosively throughout the western lowlands of the archipelago.

- As far as we can tell, there was little conflict between the Yayoi newcomers and the Jomon people, who seem to have been receptive to new ideas about farming. The one area of resistance to Yayoi agriculture appears to have been in the northeast of the country, where Jomon peoples retained their commitment to a marine-based lifeway.
- Rice farming spread through the rest of the islands in two stages: through Honshu by around 100 B.C.E. and throughout the rest of the islands by 700 C.E., bringing with it new tools, architectural styles, and cultural ideas.
- With the advent of full-blown agriculture, more complex technologies, larger villages, and metallurgy, Japanese culture had clearly entered a new stage, one that would be marked by the emergence of surpluses, social complexity, elites, and powerful individuals, such as chiefs.

Suggested Reading

Barnes, *China, Korea and Japan*.

Pearson, *Ancient Japan*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of Japan's geographical isolation as an island state?
2. What is the meaning of the use of Jomon pottery, arguably the first pottery ever produced in world history?

Japan—Treasures of the Tomb Period

Lecture 28

With the arrival in Japan of the Yayoi people during the 1st millennium B.C.E., Japanese history and culture entered a new stage. This next phase would be marked by the creation of resource surpluses, social complexity, the emergence of elites, and the appearance of powerful individuals, culminating in a full-fledged imperial state. In this lecture and the next, we will investigate these important stages in the cultural development of Japan: the Bronze Age of the Yayoi; the Tomb Period; the reigns of the powerful Yamato kings; interaction among Japan, Korea, and China; the arrival of Buddhism; the development of the first law codes; and the culmination of all this in the glorious Nara period.

Jomon and Yayoi Lifeways

- Jomon communities appear to have been relatively egalitarian, communal in structure, and peaceful. Yayoi communities, in contrast, were often located on hilltops surrounded by defensive stockades and moats. Archaeologists have found numerous caches of weapons in these sites and many human skeletons that show clear evidence of violent attack.
- Yayoi burials are also clearly distinguished from Jomon by the value of grave goods found in the more lavish funerary structures and by the fact that elite graves are located in special cemetery sections. This is evidence of the emergence of sharp hierarchies in Yayoi communities based on wealth and status, something that is not found in the archaeological record left by Jomon communities.
- We find marked regional differences in Yayoi communities throughout the archipelago. For example, most Yayoi communities had access to bronze metallurgy, but the tools and weapons they made were quite different. Some communities specialized in bronze weapons, possibly owned by individuals, while others used bronze to make bells that seem to have been owned by the entire community.

- Along with archaeological evidence of Yayoi elites, we also have literary evidence from the 1st century C.E. on, in the form of Han and Wei dynasty annals. Third-century sources describe the Wa people (the Chinese name for the residents of the Japanese archipelago) as having divided into more than 100 small states, with several under the hegemonic control of a country called Yamatai.
 - The Chinese sources also contain several references to a powerful woman who ruled the Yamatai state as queen, the extraordinary and enigmatic Himiko, who is described as having employed shamanistic skills to secure and control the throne.
 - The Wei dynasty annals inform us that Himiko was one of at least two (and perhaps more) female rulers of Yamatai.
 - When Queen Himiko died in perhaps the year 258 C.E., the Wei sources note, “a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter.” The so-far fruitless search for this burial mound has occupied Japanese scholars for generations.

Yamatai Tombs

- By the 6th century C.E., the tombs of elite Yamatai dead were massive. The largest were surrounded by moats and faced with stone paving, and each could contain from one to several coffins. Grave goods discovered in these tombs include mirrors, swords, tools, ritual utensils, pieces of armor, and saddles, all presumably for protection in the afterlife.
- Archaeologists believe that these tombs were strongly influenced by the burial methods used in the Korean Peninsula during the contemporaneous Three Kingdoms period.
- Many of the tombs were decorated with paintings and engravings on the stone antechamber walls.
 - Some of these illustrations show groups of humans and animals apparently engaged in some sort of ritual to offer magical protection for the dead. Others depict what might be

mythological subjects: shields, quivers, a bird on the prow of a boat, and a man about to seize an extraordinary animal.

- Intriguingly, many of these same symbols and images would continue to resonate in later Japanese art and were often incorporated into Buddhist art following the arrival of that spiritual ideology from Korea.
- Today, these great tomb mounds, which are the most visible archaeological feature in all of Japan, are covered in grass and trees and resemble tranquil parks, but such was not their original appearance.
 - When first raised, the mounds were surrounded by rings of fired-clay statues—*haniwa* figures.
 - The carefully arranged *haniwa* seem to capture in stone the sort of ritual ceremonies that must have accompanied the burials of kings and other elites.
- Representations and artifacts of armor abound in all East Asian tombs of this period, and in the Japanese tombs in particular, we see the antecedents of the powerful warrior class that later came to dominate Japanese society—the samurai. Also common to the tombs of ancient Chinese, Korean, and Japanese elite warriors is the horse.
- The source of the power of the kings and other elites buried in these Chinese, Korean, and Japanese tombs was wealth from successful farming and trade. Strong



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Many of the *haniwa* are sufficiently detailed to give us some idea of how elite men and women dressed during the Tomb Period.

archaeological evidence indicates that agricultural productivity in Japan grew enormously in the 5th century C.E. because of new tools and techniques that arrived from Korea, including the first iron tools and plows and improved irrigation techniques.

- The more powerful kings, buried in the largest, keyhole-shaped tombs, also entered into a complex network of allegiances with other, less powerful chieftains in various regions of Japan.
 - Archaeologists can determine both the status of the interred and the allegiance network to which he or she belonged by calculating the number and quality of polished bronze mirrors found in the tombs.
 - The picture archaeologists describe is of a handful of central, powerful kings distributing mirrors to allies and subordinates as part of the allegiance network, similar to the tributary system successfully used by various Chinese dynasties.
 - By the 6th century, however, many of the regional Yamatai chiefs seem to have become less autonomous, probably because they were being incorporated into new and more powerful kinship groups that were emerging.
 - Later written sources suggest that the 5th and 6th centuries also witnessed the development of a court system, which was serviced by specialized social groups called *be*, who supplied the elites with food, tools, weapons, clothing, and perhaps scribes. These courts were dominated by hereditary kinship or clan groups, although these were probably political rather than family groups at this stage.

The Emergence of States

- By the mid-6th century, the Yamato kingdoms and their allied cultures were on the verge of the next major development in Japanese culture: the appearance of a genuine complex state.

- Many of the criteria that archaeologists use to define states were in place: elites supported by agricultural surpluses, tributary systems, trade, monumental architecture, craft specialization, kings, and courts. What was missing was any sort of formal administrative system, nor were writing, bureaucracy, laws, taxation, or any mechanism for directly controlling outlying territories in place.
- The appearance of a clear-cut state in Japan can be attributed partly to the arrival of Buddhism, which had a powerful effect on cultural and political development.
 - The arrival of Buddhism, probably around 400 C.E., sparked violent clashes between those clans that supported the “foreign” ideology and those that opposed it because it clashed with vested interests they had in local ritual systems.
 - In the end, the pro-Buddhist factions won, and the Buddhist hierarchy that arose as a result came to compete with the political rulership of the Yamato, strongly influencing state development.
 - As we have seen in India, the Kushan Empire, the Northern Wei and Sui dynasties, and elsewhere, Buddhists relied on state tolerance and patronage in Japan. In return for this, Buddhist hierarchies supported rulers and imperial administrations; state building often went hand in hand with religion building.
- After the arrival of Buddhism and a temple hierarchy, the next major influence on state building in Japan came at the end of the 6th century. A kinship clan known as the Soga, who may also have been immigrants from Korea, seized power in the Yamato court.
- The powerful leader of the Soga in the late 6th and early 7th centuries was Soga no Umako, who maintained his power by manipulating the kingship through marriage. State histories of the 8th century make much of the enlightened reigns of Umako’s niece Queen Suiko and her famous nephew and regent Prince Shotoku. He is said to have centralized Soga power, issued the first constitution in Japanese history, and launched a program of cultural investigation.

- The ambitious programs of Umako and Shotoku provoked a backlash against the Soga by other clans. In 645, two princes from rival clans staged a coup d'état, assassinating the leading Soga and their supporters. These princes then introduced a new formal taxation and administrative structure, aimed at more strongly centralizing power.
- The next major influence on state formation in Japan occurred 18 years later; this was the victory in 663 C.E. of the Tang and Silla alliance over the Paekche kingdom in Korea, which created a foreign-affairs crisis in Japan.
 - Fearing imminent attack by combined Tang/Silla forces, those Japanese islands and coasts closest to Korea were heavily fortified.
 - The need to pay for these expensive fortifications led to the introduction of a more sophisticated government bureaucracy based on written communication and formal taxation. It also allowed the court to establish even firmer central control of the outlying regions of Japan.
- The final stage in the process of creating a powerful and formal state in Japan occurred during the reigns of Temmu and his consort Jito in the second half of the 7th century.
 - First, a census of the population was taken to extract more taxes, conscripted labor, and military service. Then, the power of local nobles was further weakened, the first complete legal codes were promulgated, and Buddhism was brought more firmly under state control.
 - But perhaps the most important innovation of all carried out by Temmu and Jito was the adoption of the official title *tenno* for the ruler of Japan and the name Nihon or Nippon for the Japanese state. Both these terms have survived for more than 1,300 years; to this day, Japan is referred to as Nippon-koku—literally, the “State of Japan,” and the emperor as the *tenno*, or “heavenly sovereign.”

- Another of the great projects of Temmu and Jito was the construction of a new and permanent capital city, Heijo (modern Nara), as the symbol of their new state. The construction of this city, strongly influenced by Chinese urban planning and the great Tang capital of Changan, marks the beginning of another new era in Japanese history, the Nara period.

Suggested Reading

Schirokauer et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 6.

Totman, *A History of Japan*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the relative egalitarianism of the Jomon period give way to the appearance of sharp hierarchies and powerful leaders during the Yayoi period?
2. Is it reasonable to suggest that the emergence of the mounted warrior aristocrat in China, Korea, and Japan is a reflection of the power of the mounted armies of the steppe nomadic people?

Japan—Nara and the Great Eastern Temple

Lecture 29

In perhaps the most important innovation introduced into Japanese culture by the rulers Temmu and Jito, the official title *tenno* was adopted for the ruler of Japan and the name Nihon or Nippon for the Japanese state. The adoption of these terms constituted the intentional final steps in legitimizing and strengthening the power of the throne and transforming Japan into a full-fledged state. At the end of the last lecture, we also saw another of the great projects of Temmu and Jito: the construction of a new capital city, Heijo, as the symbol of the new state. The founding of this city marks the beginning of a new era in Japanese history, the Nara Period.

The City of Heijo

- The Taika reforms of the year 645 C.E. are recognized by many historians as the moment that the Yamato began to transform itself from a kingdom to a legitimate state. These efforts to create a state based on Tang administrative models took place over a period of about 100 years, from the end of the 6th century to the beginning of the 8th.
 - In both Japan and Korea during this same period, the reforms involved a complete restructuring of the administration, taxation, and legal systems of the two countries along Tang dynasty lines.
 - It is no surprise that both countries also decided to build planned capital cities as the symbols for their new states, cities that might mirror the glorious Tang capital of Changan.
- The capital city of Heijo (modern Nara) was completed in 710, during the reign of Empress Jito, and gives its name to the Nara period. By the mid-8th century, Nara was home to about 100,000 people.

- Like Changan, Heijō had a central avenue that ran from the southern gate to the palace in the north. The avenue bisected a grid of streets, and within the grid, land plots were allocated according to rank, with the elites and their mansions located closest to the palace.
- The palace itself had a huge main gate manned by armed guards. Stretching away from the gate in both directions was a wall 30 feet high, protecting a palace complex that measured 1,300 by 1,100 yards.
- At the heart of the palace was the Great Supreme Hall, where the emperor oversaw state ceremonies and greeted foreign dignitaries. The hall was also the center of court life and was surrounded by pleasure gardens, offices, kitchens, and storehouses.
- Some idea of the wealth and aesthetic sensibilities of the imperial and other elite families who lived in Nara can be gained from the valuable goods preserved in the Shosoin, a storehouse still standing in the compound of the Todaiji Temple today. The Shosoin contained books, weapons, silk, bronze mirrors, musical instruments, medicines, and magnificent art objects of gold, glass, mother of pearl, and lacquer.

The Todaiji Temple and Japanese Buddhism

- The magnificent Todaiji Temple in Nara reminds us that this was also a great age of Buddhism in Japan, as it was in contemporary China and Korea. The temple was constructed just to the east of the palace and contained a gigantic bronze Buddha cast partly from thousands of bronze mirrors that the ladies of the court had donated.
 - The temple complex also featured two pagodas more than 330 feet high. The original function of the pagoda structure was to house sacred relics of the Buddha.
 - In the year 752 C.E., the Great Buddha and temple complex were officially dedicated by the emperor. Early Japanese sources tell us that the ceremony involved 10,000 monks, 4,000 musicians and dancers, and 7,000 state officials. As the

ceremony reached its climax, a visiting Indian Buddhist monk painted in the colored eyes of the Great Buddha.

- When Buddhism was first introduced into Japan, the Buddha was regarded by the people as a *kami*, a generic term used to describe any of the supposedly innumerable divinities in the world.
 - In the 6th and 7th centuries, the new religion came to be seen as a kind of magic, similar to the magical religion that developed into Shintoism.
 - In both cases, people believed that supernatural entities could be accessed through prayer and ritual to cure illness, avert disaster, and obtain the good things in life. Thus, it was natural for them to pray for such blessings simultaneously at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples.
 - The survival of Shintoism, whose origins can probably be traced back to the Jomon period, is thus another example of the Japanese retention of indigenous beliefs and characteristics, despite the overwhelming cultural influence from China.
 - Japan adopted Buddhism and Confucianism from China, but the Japanese continued to observe the rites of Shintoism, which revolves around the worship of ancestors and a host of nature spirits and deities.
- For the first century or so following its arrival in Japan from Korea during the Three Kingdoms era, Buddhism remained a largely private religion for powerful families, such as the Soga.
- Around the time of the Taika reforms in 645, Buddhism started to reach a larger audience, partly because of state patronage. King Jomei had the Great Temple of Paekche constructed near his palace, and King Temmu then built what was called the Daikan Daiji, or Great Official Temple. For various political reasons, the government decided to invest great amounts of treasure and labor in supporting the Buddhist religion and building its infrastructure.

- This support reached a climax during the Nara period, particularly during the reign of Emperor Shomu (r. 724–749). It was Shomu who had the Todaiji Temple constructed and presided over the ceremony to dedicate the massive Buddha in the Great Buddha Hall.
- By this stage in Japan's history, Buddhism had become the religion of the state, and large state prayer rituals were conducted, not so much for personal salvation but for the protection of the nation as a whole. Indeed, the rulers of Nara used fairly strict legal codes and government authority to control the version of Buddhism that was taught to the people.
- Socially, the Buddhist hierarchy was now on the same level as elite government officials and was materially supported by state resources. But Buddhist affairs also increasingly came under the control of bureaucrats. For example, those entering the priesthood now needed government permission, and the legal codes contained lists of prohibitions and restrictions on the behavior of monks.
 - On the one hand, this control meant that Japanese Buddhism was unable to produce any original religious philosophy because it might transgress the state-sponsored orthodox version.
 - On the other hand, the religious community, supported by the wealth and resources of the state, was able to create glorious art.

Nara Period Art and Literature

- The temples around Nara, many of which survive today, were masterpieces of architectural planning. Much of the art inside the temples was created by visiting or resident Chinese and Korean artists.
- Horyuji Temple contains a superb elongated sculpture known as the *Kudara Kannon*. Some of the oldest paintings in Japan are found on the cabinet-sized Jewel-Beetle Shrine in the same temple, which is decorated with iridescent beetle wings set into metal edging.



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Nara temple complexes were carefully planned, with buildings placed in a particular vertical order based on the perspective from the main gate toward the back hall.

- The Toshodaiji Temple of Nara was founded by a Chinese monk named Ganjin. Shipwrecked and delayed by storms and government opposition, Ganjin finally reached Japan after six attempts, but by then, he had gone blind!
 - The sculpted portrait of Ganjin in the Toshodaiji Temple reminds us that the Buddhist culture of Nara was very cosmopolitan, with important practitioners coming from India, Korea, and China.
 - This was one of the great periods of Silk Roads exchanges, and we know that priests, merchants, and ambassadors from Tang China, the Silla court, India, and Persia regularly visited Nara.
 - Partly this was a reflection of the “internationalism” of Buddhism, and partly it was a product of the hunger for transcultural exchange that so characterized this extraordinary era of Eastern civilization. Japan would not experience this

level of contact with the outside world again for more than 1,000 years, until after the Meiji Restoration of the 19th century.

- In literature, too, the Nara period was a golden age. Sacred texts from China and Korea were copied and commented on in flowing calligraphy; we actually know of some 100,000 volumes of sacred text that have survived from the 8th century!
 - Japan's first history texts were also produced at Nara, including the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), published in 712 C.E., and the *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), published in 720.
 - One of the greatest anthologies of Japanese poetry was also produced during the Nara period: the *Manyōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*), which contains more than 4,500 poems.

From Nara to Heian

- Although the Nara court had to face no foreign crises or full-blown civil wars, it did have its share of problems, including periodic famines and a two-year smallpox epidemic. But the biggest challenges came from bitterly disputed succession problems and power struggles. At the center of many of these struggles was the Fujiwara clan, whose ancestors had helped stage the anti-Soga coup in 645.
- The emperor Shomu (r. 724–756) was from the Fujiwara clan. His clan used intermarriage into the royal blood line to advance their claims and managed to dominate many of the leading positions on the Council of State Affairs. But after the death of Shomu, his Fujiwara consort left no male heirs; thus, their daughter was eventually placed on the throne.
- Empress Koken/Shotoku left no successor, and her reign was punctuated by the increasing power and independence of the Buddhist hierarchy and the unbridled ambition of the Fujiwara. These problems would provide instability in Japan for centuries to come.

- In 781, the great-grandson of Tenji, Kanmu, acceded to the throne. He was already middle aged and was determined to move quickly to reduce the power of the Buddhist temples and the ambitious noble kinship groups. To meet these goals, he moved the court from Nara to a new capital at Nagaoka.
- A decade later, the capital was moved again to a new site at Heian (modern Kyoto). This capital would remain the royal seat for the next 1,100 years.

Suggested Reading

Saburo Ienagi, *Japanese Art*.

Schirokauer et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 6.

Tsunoda and Carrington, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do some scholars regard the Japanese city of Nara as the ultimate terminus of the Silk Roads?
2. Why is the Nara period seen as a cultural golden age in Japanese history?

Japan—The World of the Heian

Lecture 30

Although the Heian period began with a strong assertion of imperial power by Emperor Kanmu, this was not to last. Under the influence of the aristocracy, the Heian introduced a new political and social system—part imperial, part feudal—that would dominate Japan for almost 1,000 years. After 1185 C.E., real power moved from the capital at Kyoto to the countryside, where it resided in the hands of shoguns and their armies of samurai warriors. The Heian period saw two centuries of relative peace, dominated by the powerful Fujiwara house. But the emperor increasingly became only a figurehead, and it was the Fujiwara regents who were the power behind the throne.

Heian System of Government

- For the first 50 years of the Heian, Emperor Kanmu and his successors successfully maintained the preexisting framework of the imperial state system. But after that first half century, the house of Fujiwara began to assert its authority and eventually came to dominate the state without ever actually displacing the imperial house.
- This structure, which has continued to a certain extent to the present day, allowed the emperor to continue to function as the titular head of the government and to remain an object of veneration, although he possessed no real political power. Ever since the 9th century, the Japanese political order has been based on a split between a publicly recognized imperial figure and a separate agent of effective rule.
- This profound change in the Japanese system of government can be traced to the rise of the Fujiwara hereditary house, which in turn can be explained by changes in the principles of land ownership.

Land Ownership in Japan

- Under the pre- and early-Heian legal system, all land essentially belonged to the crown. The government had the right to allocate land for farming and for aristocratic and Buddhist estates and to decide which land was taxable and which was tax free. The noble estates were augmented by land from local peasant farmers who could not meet their tax burdens.
- Eventually, in many of the outlying districts of Japan, powerful noble houses were able to increase their land holdings so significantly that the officials of the central government lost authority and control over them. These great estates (*shoen*) became hereditary possessions of aristocratic families, who were often granted tax-exempt status in return for supporting the central government and were often also immune from bureaucratic interference.
- Because the elite landowners were often away in court, the estates were managed by administrators, who also received rights of income from the lands. These rights (*shiki*) entitled individuals to a percentage of income from the estates and could be further subdivided or sublet and even passed on to heirs. Over the centuries, the system became extraordinarily complicated; eventually, four levels of rights holders were recognized even in a single estate!
- The government attempted to regulate the process, but the great estates continued to grow, as did the power of the families that controlled them. Government officials dispatched to rural areas to collect taxes on the remaining public-owned land also became increasingly autonomous and wealthy. In the capital, the great families competed for status and power; the most important public offices came to be dominated by the nobility.
- With wealth, power, and even the bureaucracy now essentially under private control, the Heian government became very different

from the government of the Nara period. For most of the 9th and 10th centuries, it was controlled by the house of Fujiwara.

- Using intermarriage with the imperial family to amass power, by 857, the northern branch of the Fujiwara clan had one of its members in a powerful position to influence the throne: the statesman Fujiwara no Yoshifusa.
 - When a grandson of Yoshifusa was placed on the imperial throne as Emperor Seiwa, Yoshifusa became regent to the young emperor.
 - This new regent position (*kanpaku*) was institutionalized and became the mechanism whereby the Fujiwara could wield real power.
 - Although there were some attempts to oppose the power of the Fujiwara, the clan used the regent system to effectively dominate and control Heian government for centuries.

Heian Literature

- Over time, the elite society of the Heian period grew more aloof from the common people and began to ridicule rural lifeways. Day-to-day administration of government and private estates was now handled by underling officials, leaving the aristocrats free to devote themselves to their refined lifestyle in court and to pursue their aesthetic interests.
- A famous literary work from the period is the *Genji Monogatari* (the *Tale of Genji*), written by a lady-in-waiting at court, Lady Murasaki Shikibu. With extraordinary insight, Lady Murasaki describes the romantic intrigues of her time, offers intricate and subtle psychological portraits of her characters, and gives us rich insight into the world of the Heian elite.
- Another great literary work of the period, the *Tale of Konjaku*, describes a harsh and miserable peasant lifestyle very different from the refined world of the capital.

Heian Warrior Class

- Before conscription had been introduced during the Tomb Period, trained warriors had been associated with particular hereditary houses far back into early Japanese history. Even after conscription was introduced, this class of “private” fighters never disappeared.
- With the abandonment of the conscription system just before the Heian period, the central government lost the ability to raise state armies. Military power and responsibility passed into the hands of provincial officials and the great hereditary houses. The warrior class that arose did not live in the capital but in the provincial regions—and it was these fighters who evolved into the famed samurai.
- Samurai warriors were members of a rural elite, living on their own lands. In certain regions, large local warrior organizations developed, in which the samurai honed their skills through repeated clashes. These organizations kept order in the provinces, fighting for various wealthy patrons and jockeying for power.
- Two of the greatest warrior associations coalesced around the powerful Minamoto and Taira clans; members of both were involved in rebellions in the 10th century. By the 11th century, some of these clashes had developed into full-scale wars, including one that lasted between 1028 and 1087.



The *Tale of Genji* demonstrates the author's great store of knowledge about relations between men and women and the refined interests of the Heian elites.

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Heian Cultural Achievements

- Undoubtedly, Heian culture deeply reflected Chinese traditions; most literature copied Chinese models and was written in Chinese, and young men received their formal education by learning to read and write in the Chinese language and studying the classics of Chinese philosophy. The Japanese writing system also reflected Chinese influence.
- The other overwhelming influence that came to Japan filtered through China was Buddhism. In the Heian period, different and distinctly Japanese variants of Buddhism began to emerge, which went on to also influence the further development of Shinto.
 - Emperor Kanmu supported the ideals of a Buddhist monk, Saicho, who spread the broad and accommodating Tendai version of Buddhism.
 - Tendai Buddhism holds that everyone can gain enlightenment through meditation. It became so popular in Japan that Saicho's temple at Mount Hiei grew into a vast complex of 3,000 buildings.
 - In the late 9th century, a bitter split developed between the followers of another Tendai monk, Ennin, and those of his successor. This led to the introduction of a new force in Japanese Buddhism: well-armed temple militias, whose *akuso* ("evil monks") engaged in violence and learned the skills of combat.
 - The other major school of Buddhism during the Heian was Shingon, founded by the monk Kukai (774–835). This version was focused on mystic spoken formulae and on the secret oral transmission of knowledge from master to student. The teachings were esoteric and difficult to understand, yet because Shingon used mystical rites, incantations, and exorcism, it also became popular in the Heian.
 - The great majority of Japanese people during the Heian lived in a world permeated by religion and magic. In this strange

mix, various versions of Buddhism and Shintoism blended with Confucianism, yin and yang philosophy, geomancy, and exorcism.

- As we have already seen, the Heian was a rich era for literature. Superb Chinese-style poetry and prose was written, along with Japanese vernacular poetry. Many of the Heian classic poems were collected and published in the *Kokinshu* (*Collection of Ancient and Modern Poetry*).
- Japanese architecture was also transformed in the Heian, particularly the layout of new temples. When Saicho and Kukai built their temples, they abandoned the formal symmetrical plans of the Nara and accommodated construction to the natural environment. Trees, rock outcrops, and streams became an integral part of the spiritual experience in a way that has remained distinctly Japanese ever since.
- Painting thrived in the Heian period, notably on the screens of sliding doors that were decorated with landscapes. Late in the Heian, glorious picture scrolls also appeared, which combined text and images to illustrate scenes from fictional tales.

The End of the Heian

- Despite the sumptuousness of cultural life in the court, late in the Heian period, the countryside was transformed as the equal-field system fell apart and aristocratic clans accumulated most of the land for themselves and their private armies.
- By the 12th century, the two most powerful clans—the Taira and Minamoto—were engaged in open war. In 1185, the Minamoto emerged victorious, a victory that brought to an end the Heian period.
- The Minamoto claimed the right to rule in the name of the figurehead emperor and installed a shogun (military governor), who now ruled the imperial structure. The Minamoto established the new seat for their government at Kamakura, and as we will see later

in the course, they went on to rule Japan for the next four centuries in an era known as the Kamakura shogunate.

Suggested Reading

Hurst Jr., “The Structure of the Heian Court.”

Saburo Ienagi, *Japanese Art*.

Tyler, “Introduction” to *The Tale of Genji*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the house of Fujiwara manage to dominate the Japanese state during the Heian without actually displacing the imperial house?
2. What is *The Tale of Genji*, and what insights does it give us into the refined lifestyle of the elites during the Heian?

Southeast Asia—Vietnam

Lecture 31

In this lecture and the next, we'll look at the history and culture of the Southeast Asia region. Inevitably, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaya, and various other states in the region became members of the vast cultural zone dominated by China. We will investigate the impact of many of the foundational elements of Eastern civilization we have looked at earlier on the states and peoples of Southeast Asia, and we'll explore the impact that political, economic, and cultural developments in Southeast Asian states had on China and Eastern civilization more generally. In this lecture, we begin with the history and culture of Vietnam, from its earliest interactions with ancient China through its colonization by the French in the 18th century.

Ancient Viet History

- The first recorded mention of the Viets appears in Han dynasty annals, where they are described as “southern barbarians” who resisted Qin dynasty raids into south China in the 220s B.C.E. At that time, the Viet kingdom extended quite a way along the southern coast of what is Chinese territory today.
- The Qin raids had little political impact, but they boosted the small-scale trade that had existed between the Viets and Chinese for centuries. In exchange for Chinese silk, the Viets sent to China ivory, tortoiseshell, pearls, peacock feathers, and aromatic woods.
- In the decades that followed the Qin raids, expansionist Viet rulers defeated the warlords who controlled the Red River valley (which today is in China) and brought their lands under Viet control.
- The Viets intermarried with many of their neighbors, including the residents of the Red River valley and the Khmer (Cambodian) and Thai people, all of which contributed to the formation of the Vietnamese people as a distinct ethnic identity. This willingness of the Vietnamese to intermarry suggests that, before Vietnam was

conquered by the Han, Vietnamese culture had much in common with the other peoples of Southeast Asia and was distinctly different from Chinese culture.

- For example, none of the Southeast Asian spoken languages had any linguistic relationship with Chinese. The Viets also had a strong tradition of village autonomy and favored the nuclear family over the larger extended family preferred by the Chinese.
- Even after the Chinese conquered Vietnam politically and after the introduction of Buddhism from China, many of these distinct cultural practices were preserved.

Chinese Conquest of Vietnam

- As the Western Han began to consolidate power throughout China and East Asia in the 3rd century B.C.E., they soon came into contact with the Viets. Initially, the Han accepted an acknowledgement of vassal status from the Viets, along with periodic payments of tribute, but in 111 B.C.E., the Han decided to conquer the Viets outright and govern them directly as a Han province.
- The Red River area was garrisoned with Han troops, and Chinese administrators who were dispatched to the region encouraged local lords to learn the Chinese language and culture. Realizing that they had much to learn from the Han state, the Viet elites decided to cooperate with the Chinese. The Chinese government saw the Viets as another “barbarian” people, ripe for assimilation, and thus, worked hard to introduce the essential elements of their civilization into their new southern province.
- Over the centuries of Han rule that followed, the Viet elites were drawn into the superb government structure administered by the Han Confucian bureaucracy. In the rural areas, the Han introduced sophisticated Chinese agricultural techniques and irrigation technology, which quickly made Vietnam the most productive rice-growing region in all of East Asia.

- As a result, the Viet population grew, particularly along the Red River valley and coastal regions to the south. The Viet elites then used the lessons of Chinese statecraft to extend their own military control over regions further west and south, which helped spread elements of Chinese culture more widely throughout Southeast Asia. The Chinese must have assumed that the Vietnamese barbarians were well on their way to becoming civilized.
- But as many later invaders were to learn, the roots of Vietnamese resistance to conquest and colonization ran deep. Ultimately, the Chinese were frustrated by a series of revolts against their hegemony by Vietnamese elites and even more so by the failure of Viet peasants to adopt Chinese culture.

Opposition to Chinese Rule

- As the decades of colonialism passed, the elites increasingly chaffed against Chinese hegemony. Viet lords galvanized the common people to join them in revolt.
- One of the most famous revolts was instigated by women—the Trung sisters—who led an uprising against the Han in 39 C.E. The actions of the Trung sisters further demonstrate the profound difference that existed in the status of women in Vietnamese and Chinese societies, a major contributing factor to the failure of the Chinese to assimilate the Viets.
- Along with cultural incentives to resist the Chinese, the Vietnamese struggle was assisted by the fragile links that bound Chinese administrators to their colonies. Vietnam was a long way from the Chinese capitals in the north, separated by daunting environmental obstacles. These problems meant that Chinese administrators charged with supplying military expeditions and garrisons in the south faced logistical nightmares.
- The well-informed Viet elites were also quick to seize on periods of political turmoil and nomadic invasion in China to assert their independence. They tried several times to free themselves at these



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The opposition of Vietnamese women to the repressive Confucian family system was evidenced by the revolt against the Han led by the Trung sisters.

opportune moments—for example, in the interregnum between the early and later Han and during the Age of Disunity.

- Finally, the Viets staged a massive rebellion after the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907 C.E., and by 939, the people had won political independence from their giant northern neighbor. Both the Mongols and the Ming dynasty later tried to reassert control over Vietnam, but both efforts ended in humiliating defeats for the invaders.

Independent Vietnam

- From the late 10th century on, a succession of local dynasties ruled a politically independent Vietnam, beginning with the Lê dynasty, which governed for almost three decades between 980 and 1009 C.E.
- Although the Vietnamese were now free from direct Chinese control, Chinese cultural exports, particularly ideas about government, continued to play a critical role in Vietnam and even helped legitimize claims to authority among the various local dynasties.

- Still, the Vietnamese scholar-bureaucrats never enjoyed the prestige of their Chinese counterparts, partly because the control of the central government at the village level was much less secure. Local officials tended to identify more with the peasantry than with their government masters in the capital and, on some occasions, even led uprisings against the ruling dynasties.
- Government scholar-bureaucrats also had to contend with competition from well-educated Buddhist monks. And unlike the situation in China, Korea, or Japan, these Vietnamese Buddhist monks had much stronger links with the villages and peasants than they did with the state hierarchy, which made them more resistant to the bureaucrats.
- In sum, the fact that independent Vietnam had so many competing centers of power prevented the dynastic rulers and their bureaucrats from achieving the sort of authority over the people that their counterparts in other East Asian states enjoyed.

Vietnamese Expansion

- The main adversaries of the Vietnamese were the Cham and Khmer peoples, who occupied lowland areas to the south that the Vietnamese sought to settle themselves. With their well-organized bureaucracy and larger military, the Vietnamese fought a series of generally successful expansionary wars between the 11th and 18th centuries against the Chams, driving them into the highlands.
- Once settled on the Chams' former farmlands, the Viets turned their attention to the Khmer people, who occupied the Mekong Delta. Once again, Indian-style Khmer armies were no match for well-trained Chinese-style Vietnamese troops. By the time French missionaries began to arrive in the 18th century, the Vietnamese had already occupied much of the Mekong Delta and were pushing into territory that today is part of Cambodia.
- As Vietnamese armies, farmers, and administrators moved further away from the capital in Hanoi, however, the ruling dynasties found

it more difficult to maintain control of the provinces. And as the southern Viets intermarried with Chams and Khmers, differences in culture between north and south also began to emerge.

- Although both groups still identified themselves as Vietnamese, the northerners came to view the southerners as less intelligent and less sophisticated.
- This meant that as Hanoi's hold on the south weakened, regional military commanders became more independent.
- By the 16th century, the Nguyen family had emerged in the south to challenge the legitimacy of the Trinh dynasty in the north. For the next two centuries, the Nguyen (who ruled from Hue on the northern Mekong Delta) fought the Hanoi-based Trinh, and Vietnam was essentially divided into a north-and-south political structure.

French Colonization

- The struggle between the Nguyen and Trinh dynasties so absorbed the energies of the Vietnamese people that it distracted them from recognizing a growing external menace: France!
- When French missionaries first appeared on the shores of Vietnam in the 17th century, the Vietnamese people were welcoming, and many converted to Catholicism. But by the late 18th century, French interest in Vietnam had become less spiritual and decidedly more political.
- A rebellion staged by the Tay Son dynasty in the late 1770s resulted in the overthrow of the Trinh and Nguyen dynasties. The French decided to throw their support behind a surviving Nguyen prince in the south, Nguyen Anh, who used French resources to attack and eventually destroy the Tay Son rulers in the north. Nguyen Anh then proclaimed a united Vietnam and ruled from the old Trinh capital at Hue, rewarding his French allies with a special place in court.
- Nguyen Anh proclaimed himself Emperor Gia Long, launching the first dynasty in centuries to rule a united Vietnam. But the French were to be bitterly disappointed by their backing of Gia Long,

because he and his successors proved to be arch conservatives who were deeply committed to strengthening Confucian values.

- Gia Long's successor came to view the French Catholics as a danger to the dynasty and began a campaign of persecution against the missionaries. Outraged, church authorities in France demanded action from the government, and Napoleon III approved a naval expedition in 1858 to punish the Vietnamese. By 1862, the court at Hue had been forced to cede several provinces in the Mekong Delta to France, and by 1890, the whole of the country was under French control.
- In the 20th century, failed attempts by the French to reassert control over their Southeast Asian colonial empire eventually got caught up with the Cold War, and tens of thousands of young American soldiers learned just how deeply the roots of Vietnamese resistance against foreign control grew, just as countless thousands of Chinese and even Mongol soldiers had learned centuries and millennia before.

Suggested Reading

Chapuis, *A History of Vietnam*.

Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, volume 1.

Questions to Consider

1. How was Vietnamese culture both strongly influenced by but also able to resist the powerful cultural influence coming from the Chinese?
2. How have ethnic and cultural differences within Vietnam contributed to a historical north-south divide?

Southeast Asia—Indian and Islamic Influences

Lecture 32

In the first of two lectures on Southeast Asia, we traced the history of Vietnam from its earliest interactions with China through to its colonization by the French in the 18th and 19th centuries, bringing it to the cusp of the 20th century. In addition to history, however, this course is also about the origins and evolution of the core philosophical, political, religious, artistic, and cultural practices and beliefs that distinguish Eastern civilization. Thus, in this second lecture on Southeast Asia, we will return to religion and trace the spread of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam to see what impact these “foreign” belief systems had in the region and on Eastern civilization more generally.

The Spread of Religion from India

- At the same time that Buddhism was spreading north from India into Central and East Asia, it was also beginning to attract a following in Southeast Asia. As we’ve seen earlier, the Silk Roads played a critical role here, although this time, it was the maritime Silk Roads. Buddhist ideas and beliefs were carried by sailors who traveled from India across the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia.
- As a result, by the 1st century C.E., clear signs of Indian cultural influence appeared across the Southeast Asian region.
 - In Java; Sumatra; other islands of modern Indonesia; and the mainland regions of the Malay Peninsula, Cambodia, and Vietnam, rulers of states began to adopt the Indian model of kingship and to call themselves *raja* (“king”) in the manner of Indian rulers.
 - As we saw in the last lecture on Vietnam, many rulers also converted to Buddhism and appointed Buddhist advisers to their courts.

- But Buddhism was not the only Indian religion to make its way across the maritime trade routes to Southeast Asia; Hinduism also left an indelible mark on the region.
 - In addition to reading the great Buddhist treatises, many Southeast Asian rulers also embraced the classics of Indian literature, such as the epic poems the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which promoted Hindu values.
 - These rulers did not show any enthusiasm for the caste system, and they continued to acknowledge the nature spirits that their people had worshiped for millennia, but they did find Hinduism attractive because the faith supported the principle of monarchical rule.

Origins and Ideas of Hinduism

- Hinduism emerged in India at more or less the same time as Buddhism as a syncretic faith incorporating Vedic texts, pre-Aryan practices, and many gods of different origins. Ultimately, Hinduism triumphed in India because it addressed the needs of the Indian people more effectively than Buddhism did.
- Hindu values are most clearly represented in the *Bhagavad Gita* (*Song of the Lord*), a short poetic work that illustrates the obligations and rewards of Hinduism. The overall message of the work is that salvation is not achieved through meditative detachment and renunciation of ordinary life, as in Buddhism, but through actively participating in the world and meeting the responsibilities of one's caste.
- The message of the *Gita* led to the four essential aims of human life that are still at the heart of Hinduism today.
 - One must be obedient to religious and moral laws (*dharma*).
 - One should pursue economic well-being and honest prosperity (*artha*).
 - One should enjoy social, physical, and sexual pleasures (*kama*).

- One must work for the salvation of the soul (*moksha*).
- By articulating these realistic and less demanding aims for life, Hinduism eventually replaced Buddhism as the most prominent religion in India.

Indian Influence in Southeast Asia

- The first Southeast Asian state to reflect strong Indian and Hindu influence was Funan, located on the lower reaches of the Mekong River. The wealthy rulers of Funan controlled the bulk of trade between India and China.
 - These rulers took to calling themselves *raja* and claimed divine sanction for their rule, as Indian kings did; they also introduced ceremonies and rituals worshiping Hindu gods.
 - As these traditions became more entrenched at court, they spread among the common people, helping embed Hindu ethics and practices deeply into Southeast Asian culture.
 - During the 6th century C.E., Funan was wracked by a bitter internal power struggle, and by the end of the century, the once-powerful state had passed into oblivion.
- After the fall of Funan, political leadership of Southeast Asia passed into the hands of the rulers of the kingdom of Srivijaya, based on the island of Sumatra.
 - Between 670 and 1025, Srivijaya elites built a powerful navy and controlled commerce throughout the region.
 - Unlike Funan, however, the rulers and trade officials of Srivijaya were devout Buddhists, and that faith prospered under their patronage.
 - Srivijaya remained a wealthy and powerful trading state for almost 400 years, until the south Indian state of Chola eclipsed it in the 11th century.



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The magnificent buildings at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom, built by the Khmers, are a testament to the powerful influence of Indian religion on Southeast Asian culture.

- With the decline of Srivijaya, three kingdoms—Angkor, Singosari, and Majapahit—dominated Southeast Asian affairs until the 16th century. The most famous of these kingdoms is Angkor, based in modern Cambodia and ruled by the Khmers from 889 to 1431.
 - In the 9th century, kings of the Khmers built their capital at Angkor Thom; the city was designed as a microscopic reflection of the Hindu world.
 - During the 12th century, the Khmers turned from Hinduism to Buddhism and added Buddhist temples to the complex at their capital without removing earlier Hindu structures.
- From the 8th century on, much of the coastal trade of India came to be controlled by Muslim merchant communities. Thus, in addition to Chinese and Indian cultural elements, Islamic culture also began to filter into Southeast Asia.

Origins and Beliefs of Islam

- The word *Islam* actually means “submission,” signifying obedience to the will of Allah. From the moment the religion of Islam appeared, it quickly attracted followers and took on political and social significance; it also soon reached far beyond its Arabian homeland. By the 8th century, the world of Islam was matched only by Tang China as the great political, cultural, and social giant of Eurasia.
- The prophet Muhammad was born into a world of nomadic Bedouin pastoralists and merchants in about 570 C.E. By the age of 30, he was a successful merchant living in Mecca, where the people recognized many gods and where many Jewish and Christian communities existed.
 - Sometime around the year 610, the 40-year-old Muhammad underwent a profound spiritual transformation. He became convinced that there was only one true deity—Allah (“God”)—and that recognition of any other gods was wicked.
 - Muhammad experienced visions that he interpreted as revelations being delivered to him by the archangel Gabriel, a messenger from God. Without necessarily meaning to found a new religion, he told his family and friends about these revelations, and by 620, a zealous minority of Meccans had joined Muhammad’s circle.
 - As Muhammad spoke about the revelations he had received, some of his followers prepared written texts of his teachings. During the early 620s, devout followers compiled these texts and issued them as the Quran (“recitation”), the holy book of Islam.
- The new faith of Muhammad was based on five simple obligations:
 - Acknowledgment of Allah as the only god and Muhammad as the last prophet
 - Daily prayer to Allah while facing Mecca

- Fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan
- Contribution of alms for the relief of the poor
- Undertaking of the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once, if possible.
- Because Islamic monotheism offended the polytheistic Arabs, the growing popularity of Muhammad's preaching brought him into religious conflict with the rulers of Mecca. In 622, Muhammad fled to the rival trading city of Yathrib, which Muslims soon started calling Medina ("the city of the prophet").
- Muhammad and his followers eventually grew strong enough to return to Mecca, defeat the authorities there, and launch a series of campaigns against other towns and clans; by the time of the prophet's death in 632, much of Arabia was under Islamic control.

The Spread of Islam

- After Muhammad's death, his advisers selected one of his closest friends and disciples to serve as caliph (or deputy), Abu Bakr. Under his leadership, Islamic armies began to carry their message into the world beyond Arabia. Eventually, the Muslims conquered Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, North Africa, the Sasanian Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, northern India, and most of Spain.
- In the islands and coastal ports of Southeast Asia, trading contacts facilitated the spread of Islam. Beginning with small port towns on the northern coast of Sumatra, the religion eventually spread across the Straits of Malacca to Malaya, on to Java, then to the Celebes Islands and Mindanao in the southern Philippines.
- The version of Islam that was eventually embraced by many Southeast Asian communities was suffused with mystical strains and was able to accommodate itself to earlier animist, Hindu, and Buddhist beliefs and rituals.

- The huge Islamic caliphates that appeared throughout Afro-Eurasia following the spread of Islam functioned as a political, commercial, and cultural bridge that connected much of that area into a single zone of exchanges, including many areas beyond direct Islamic political control.
- By the 9th century, extensive Muslim merchant communities were in residence in Spain, in North Africa, all over the Middle East, in India, in Central Asia, and in the southern port cities of Tang dynasty China. Over the centuries that followed, conversions throughout Southeast Asia also brought the sailors and merchants of that extensive region into the Muslim cultural orbit.

Suggested Reading

Church, *A Short History of Southeast Asia*.

Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, volume 1.

Questions to Consider

1. How did developing trade contacts between certain Southeast Asian states and India lead to the introduction of Hinduism and other Indian cultural influences into the region?
2. How did Southeast Asia's role as "middle man" lead to the spread of Islam into the region, an event of world historical significance?

The Industrial Revolution of the Song

Lecture 33

In the next 12 lectures, we will bring our consideration of the foundations of Eastern civilization up to the early 20th century by exploring the last four dynasties of Chinese history, the Song, Yuan (or Mongol), Ming, and Qing, as well as the Choson dynasty in Korea and the Tokugawa shogunate and Meiji era in Japan. We will have a pair of lectures on each of the Chinese dynasties first, focused on developments in the foundational ideas that we've explored earlier. In this lecture, we'll see the remarkable agricultural and industrial revolution staged by the Southern Song dynasty in China that turned the Song into the economic powerhouse of the world.

Emergence of the Song

- Following the collapse of the Tang dynasty in the year 907 C.E., China entered two short-lived and tumultuous periods known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.
 - In the north, dynasties succeeded each other in quick succession, none lasting longer than 16 years.
 - Irrigation systems fell apart, floods devastated the countryside, and famine was widespread.
 - Refugees fled to southern China, where the political situation was more stable, but warfare between warlords was endemic.
- This chaotic half century was brought to an end by the Northern Song dynasty, which was proclaimed in 960 C.E. and, by 978, had reimposed imperial rule over most of China.
- The Song dynasty is divided into two periods: the Northern Song (960–1126 C.E.), which ruled from Kaifeng in northern China, and the Southern Song (1126–1279), which ruled from the southern capital in modern-day Hangzhou.

- Although a combined reign duration of more than three centuries looks like evidence of successful dynastic rule, in fact, the Song never built a powerful state like that of the Han or Tang.
- Part of the reason for this is that Song rulers generally mistrusted military leaders and preferred to keep the military under the control of bureaucrats. The Song elites placed greater emphasis on civil administration, industry, education, and the arts.

History of the Song

- It was the first Song emperor, Zhao Kuangyin (reign name: Song Taizu), who inaugurated the policy of subordinating the military to the bureaucracy. Zhao Kuangyin began his career as a junior military leader for one of the small dynasties of northern China and rose through the ranks to the position of general. He then led a mutiny against the ruling emperor of the later Zhou dynasty. In 960, his troops proclaimed him emperor, a position he held until his death in 976.
- In the years after he came to power, Taizu and his army consolidated Song rule throughout northern China. Taizu was aware of the importance of having a powerful army, but he was also fearful of the potential for regional commanders to become autonomous warlords; thus, he enacted various measures to keep the military under bureaucratic control.
- Taizu regarded all state officials as servants of the imperial government, and he set about reforming the political administration of the state to increase the power of the emperor. For example, to reduce the control of high-ranking officials, assistants were also appointed to these positions, which led to a further division of duties and, thus, of individual power.
- The early Song emperors also greatly expanded the size of bureaucracy and made sure it was based on merit, not rank. They reintroduced the highly competitive Confucian civil service exam,

and they rewarded loyal bureaucratic officials handsomely. These measures resulted in perhaps the most centralized form of imperial government yet seen in world history.

- But these reforms also caused two problems that weakened the dynasty and eventually led to the fall of the Northern Song: (1) The vast administration put the imperial treasury under enormous pressure, and (2) tactical military decisions were left to scholar-bureaucrats, who had little military education or talent.
- It is hardly a coincidence, then, that nomadic peoples flourished along China's northern borders throughout the entire Northern Song period.
 - The Khitan, a semi-nomadic people from Mongolia, constantly threatened the Song and demanded and received large tribute payments of silk and silver.
 - In the early 12th century, another nomadic group, the Jurchen, attacked and conquered the Khitan and, in 1123, invaded northern China.
 - The Jurchen captured the Song capital of Kaifeng, declared the establishment of their own Jin dynasty, and immediately pushed further south, intent on conquering all of China.
 - The Song court fled south to the Yangtze Valley, where a son of the last Northern Song emperor stemmed the Jurchen tide and declared himself first emperor of the Southern Song dynasty in 1127.
 - A treaty signed in 1141 established the border between the Southern Song and Jurchen Jin dynasties about halfway between the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. This division of China remained the situation until 1279, when the Mongols ended the rule of both dynasties!

Song Agricultural Developments

- Generally in world history before the modern era, the prerequisite for economic growth has always been an increase in agricultural production, the largest sector of the premodern economy.
- During the attempted invasions of Vietnam by the Tang dynasty that we discussed earlier, the Chinese had encountered new strains of fast-ripening rice, which allowed cultivators to harvest two or even three crops a year instead of one. This strain of Champa rice was introduced into the fertile fields of southern China, leading to a greatly expanded supply of food.
- Of course, this increased agricultural impact had dramatic demographic consequences: In the year 600 C.E., the population of China was about 45 million, but by 1200 C.E., it had increased to roughly 115 million! This rapid growth was also a result of the well-organized food-distribution transport networks put in place by the Tang and Song.
- Increased food supplies and populations naturally encouraged the growth of cities; during the Southern Song, China was the most urbanized state in the world. The capital of Hangzhou had close to 2 million residents, and several other cities were home to 1 million each. City dwellers supported hundreds of restaurants, taverns, teahouses, brothels, music halls, theaters, shops, and more.
- Another result of increased food production was the emergence of a commercial agricultural sector.
 - Because of the large harvests produced by fast-growing rice, farmers could now buy cheap rice and devote their time to growing other crops, such as vegetables and fruits, to sell on the commercial market.
 - This led to an explosion of regional specialization as farmers began to grow profitable crops well suited to the environment of their provinces and export these over great distances.

Song Technological and Industrial Developments

- The enormous success of the agricultural sector led inevitably to spectacular developments in technological and industrial production. One striking example was the expansion of the porcelain industry. Song porcelain became a work of art, and vast quantities of it were exported across Eurasia.
- Production of iron and steel also surged under the Song, the result of techniques that made these metals stronger and of increased demands from commercial farmers and the military.
 - Between the 9th and 12th centuries, Song iron production increased almost tenfold, to levels that would not be seen anywhere in the world again until the 19th century.
 - Most of this increased supply of iron and steel went into weapons and agricultural implements; for example, imperial armaments manufacturers produced about 16.5 million iron arrowheads per year. Iron was also used for large-scale construction of bridges and pagodas.
- Song inventors are also justly famous for their innovations with gunpowder, a dangerous mixture of charcoal, saltpeter, and sulfur discovered during the Tang dynasty. By the 11th century, the Song military was using primitive bombs. Over time, gunpowder chemistry diffused throughout Eurasia; by the 13th century, various Islamic and European states were experimenting with iron-barreled cannons.
- Although some form of basic printing was known as early as the Sui dynasty in the 7th century, printing also reached a high standard of quality and production under the Song. Printers experimented with reusable, movable type, which sped up production. The ability to produce texts quickly and cheaply contributed to a wider dissemination of knowledge.
- During the Song era, to feed a voracious appetite for spices, Chinese mariners began to build the best ships in the world and to sail them

across the deep oceans. Within China, merchants designed human-powered paddlewheel boats to ply the rivers and canals.

- Oceangoing vessels were constructed with iron nails, waterproofed with oils, and included bulkheads made waterproof with oil-based caulking. They used canvas and bamboo sails, were steered using a stern-post rudder, and were navigated with the aid of the “south-pointing needle”—the magnetic compass.
- Chinese ships mostly plied the waters between Japan and Malaya, but some of them ventured into the Indian Ocean and called in at ports in India, Ceylon, Persia, and East Africa. These long-distance sailors helped to diffuse Chinese naval innovations.

Song Economic Developments

- Increased agricultural production, improved transportation, population growth, urbanization, and large-scale industrial production hugely stimulated the Chinese economy, making it by far the most advanced in the world at the time.
- In southern China, various regions traded their specialized crops or manufactured goods with one another, creating a thriving market economy. Millions of cultivators produced fruits and vegetables for sale on the open market, and manufacturers of silk, porcelain, and other goods supplied both domestic and foreign markets. With a fully integrated economy, foreign demand for Chinese goods fueled further economic growth.
- Trade grew so rapidly that China experienced a shortage of copper coins under the Song. To alleviate the shortage, merchants developed alternatives to cash that resulted in even more growth and the emergence of what could be described as the world’s first modern banking system. Letters of credit came into common use; later developments included promissory notes, checks, and the world’s first paper money!

- The Song presided over a land of enormous prosperity, and this economic surge had implications well beyond China. In the next lecture, we will explore some of the ramifications of this transformation, both for Chinese society and many of the core ideas of Eastern civilization and for world history.

Suggested Reading

McKnight, *Law and Order in Sung China*.

Tanner, *China: A History*, chapter 7.

Questions to Consider

1. How was the Song dynasty able to restore order following the collapse of the Tang but then lose control of northern China to the nomads?
2. Is it an exaggeration to suggest that an “industrial revolution” almost took place in southern China several centuries before it ultimately did in Europe?

Intellectual and Cultural Life of the Song

Lecture 34

As we saw in the last lecture, with the commercially minded Southern Song administration in charge, China unleashed a remarkable series of agricultural, technological, industrial, and commercial developments that transformed the state into the economic powerhouse of the world and had implications well beyond China. In this lecture, we'll see the impact of this era of heightened economic activity on the core foundational ideas of Eastern civilization, particularly in everyday life, intellectual life, and attitudes toward women. We will then conclude this two-lecture series on the Song dynasty by widening our focus to look at its impact on the world economy of the 13th century.

Everyday Life in the Southern Song

- Visual art, particularly painted scrolls, provides us with some insights into the daily lives of city dwellers in the Song. The 18-foot-long *Qingming* scroll, for example, shows fields and villages, donkeys bringing produce to market, and wealthy women being carried in sedan chairs toward the city while poorer women walk. We also see boats laden with passengers and goods, streets lined with shops, and hawkers selling food, tools, and clothes in a market stretched out along a bridge. The scene looks remarkably similar to life in China today!
- Court records from the Southern Song show all manner of claims being brought to the magistrates by men and women: arguments over land, houses, inheritances, fraud, gambling, violence, and so on. There is sharp evidence of an increasing gap between rich and poor, particularly between the wealthy merchant class in the cities and the still relatively impoverished rural peasant class.
- Song art and documents also reveal that better transport technology and infrastructure, along with the widespread dissemination of printed materials, meant that for the first time, ordinary people



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The *Qingming* scroll shows a commercial world that is familiar to most citizens of the global village of the 21st century.

in both town and country gained access to knowledge and ideas that had been restricted to the elites for the previous several thousand years.

- With so much domestic and foreign trade, along with the explosion of urbanization, Southern Song China was transformed into a prosperous, cosmopolitan, and strikingly modern society. Residents of major cities grew accustomed to seeing merchants from foreign lands. Foreign faiths and philosophies also became increasingly entrenched in premodern China.

Debates over Core Values

- With so many foreign faiths and ideologies—Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam—competing with the core beliefs of Chinese and Eastern civilization, intense discussion and debate took place among scholars over the issue of whether Chinese values should be preserved or foreign faiths and ideologies should be permitted and even promoted.
- At the heart of these debates was the fact that the Song had been unable to achieve the sort of military dominance over their

neighbors that the Han and Tang had done; this profoundly disturbed Song intellectuals.

- Those who felt the ever-present military threat from the nomadic north, along with the powerful cultural influences emanating from the large numbers of foreigners now living in Song China, became less open to foreign ideas and more intent on preserving core Chinese cultural identity.
- One immediate ramification of this was a turn against Buddhism, despite the fact that this ancient Indian philosophy had been a core Chinese and Eastern spiritual ideology for more than 1,000 years.
 - The scholar Sun Fu argued that “allowing the teachings of the barbarians” to bring disorder to “the teachings of our sages” was a humiliation to Chinese scholarship.
 - Another scholar, Shijie, wrote that it was unforgivable for Chinese to “forget their ancestors and abandon sacrifices to them, serving instead barbarian ghosts.”
- The fact that many of the nomadic confederations in the north had all zealously adopted Buddhism seemed to further underline Buddhism’s foreignness, even danger.
- Yet another cause of the increasing antagonism among Daoists, Confucians, and Buddhists was the wealth and power of the Buddhist hierarchy. Buddhist monasteries often owned high-value, tax-free land, allowing them to accumulate grain and rice, which they then distributed during times of famine. This charitable act was a powerful conversion mechanism.
- For centuries, Buddhist monasteries had been important elements in local Chinese economies, but Buddhism still posed challenges to traditional Chinese and Eastern beliefs. For example, Buddhism’s call for individuals to seek perfection by observing an ascetic ideal conflicted with traditional Chinese morality centered on the family and obligations of filial piety.

- Buddhism responded to these objections by trying to tailor its message to Chinese audiences and by offering its ideology as a faith that reinforced family values. Buddhists argued that sending just one son into a Buddhist monastery would bring salvation for 10 generations of his kin!
- The result of all these compromises and adaptations was the emergence of a syncretic version of Buddhist faith. But many Song scholars actively advocated for native Chinese beliefs—primarily Confucianism—in the hope of limiting the attraction of all foreign religions.

Neo-Confucianism

- In the midst of these debates, Song Confucians were becoming increasingly well read in Buddhist scripture. As they read more, they could not help but admire the systematic way in which Buddhist scripture tried to deal with complex issues, such as the nature of the soul and the relationship of the individual with the cosmos—topics not generally explored by Confucianism.
- These intense intellectual investigations of Buddhism eventually led to the emergence of a form of Neo-Confucianism, which became so prevalent that it has gone on to dominate much of Chinese intellectual thinking to the present day.
- Southern Song scholars discussed how to improve the Confucian civil service exam service and make it more relevant to contemporary life. Others worked on developing philosophical frameworks for Confucianism that could stand up to the sophisticated metaphysical challenges of Buddhism.
- Increasing attention was also paid to building a more ideal society by starting at the bottom—by reforming families and local communities along Confucian lines. This led to a general call for the reestablishment of “family values.”

- One result of this was a tightening of patriarchal structures as a means of enhancing family solidarity and promoting idealized “traditional values.”
- Another result was that the veneration of family ancestors became much more elaborate during the Southern Song.
- The most important Song Neo-Confucian scholar was Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Immensely learned, Zhu Xi managed to hold down several important government jobs while writing about 100 books of sophisticated philosophy. He attempted to synthesize faith and reason by arguing that real self-knowledge could be attained only through an investigation of the natural world.
 - Not surprisingly, this Aristotelian argument led to a spectacular growth in the physical and practical sciences in Song China. Song scientists made tremendous advances in medicine, astronomy, chemistry, and so on.
 - Zhu Xi’s insistence on the correctness of his own interpretations offended many other scholars as pretentious. Toward the end of his life, the Southern Song government condemned his work as “spurious learning.” Within a few decades of his death, the government reversed its condemnation and gave Zhu Xi’s ideas unprecedented political support.

Women in the Song Dynasty

- Because of the development of printing during the Southern Song and the subsequent widespread dissemination of various forms of literature, we have more written evidence about women’s lives during this period than at any previous stage in the history of Eastern civilization.
- All kinds of women are found in Song sources: wives and widows, maids, midwives, nuns, singers, courtesans, spirit mediums, farmers’ daughters, poets, and more. The impression we get from the sources is that within the home, women were influential and

important, but outside of the home—in commerce or government—they had far less power.

- Increased wealth in society meant that women were purchased in large numbers by families to become servants, concubines, and prostitutes. Upper-class families could “sell” their daughters to prospective husbands by offering large dowries. As the legal status of women gradually improved, it was the wives and widows who increasingly gained control of those dowries, rather than the husbands and their families.
- All this seems to indicate that gender developments during the Song were generally favorable to women, but other practices paint a much harsher view of the lives of women under the Song, particularly the appearance of foot-binding.
 - During the Tang dynasty, such powerful women as Empress Wu and Yang Guifei had promoted an ideal in which it was fashionable for women to engage in physical activity, such as riding horses and playing polo.
 - Under the Song, notions of beauty shifted to promote a more delicate and restrained version of the “ideal woman.” Women began to veil their faces and ride in curtained sedan chairs; the feet of young girls were tightly wrapped in cloth to prevent natural bone growth.
 - The practice of foot-binding was largely confined to wealthy families. It was not common among peasants and other classes, where women were needed for their physical skills around the farms and factories.

Global Economic Impact of the Song

- By the 12th century, China was undoubtedly the wealthiest and most powerful state on earth, a situation that continued for several centuries, including under the Mongols and the Ming. At the same time, Europe was barely emerging from what historians once called the Dark Ages.

- The Song economy was so dynamic that it could not be contained by China's borders. A huge global demand developed for Chinese exports; at the same time, wealthy Chinese consumers developed a taste for exotic goods that further stimulated trade throughout much of Afro-Eurasia.
- If the levels of production, innovation, and export of the Song had spread and been sustained, the industrialization of the world might have been led by China rather than Europe. Why did innovation not spread from China? Ironically, the reunification of China was at least partly to blame.
 - As we will see in a future lecture, after 1279, China was united again under the Mongols and then by the Ming and Qing dynasties. Each of these governments had less need for revenues from commerce, and indeed, the Ming eventually attempted to ban all foreign trade.
 - At the same time, global communications were still slow in the 12th and 13th centuries. Thus, Chinese inventions, including gunpowder, printing, and the compass, spread very slowly by today's standards.
 - The bottom line is that the world was not yet united enough, commercial enough, or interconnected enough for an industrial revolution to take place.
- By the 13th century, China was the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful state that had ever existed in the history of the world. It was, thus, a glittering prize for the new and formidable power that was emerging in the Central Asian steppes during that same century: the Mongols!

Suggested Reading

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 6.

———, *The Inner Quarters*.

Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Confucians respond to the challenges of Buddhism during the intellectual ferment of the Song dynasty?
2. What was the status of women in Song China, and why did foot-binding become so prevalent?

The Mongols Conquer the World

Lecture 35

Early in the 13th century, the Mongols moved out of their homeland to eventually conquer Central Asia, China, Korea, parts of India and Russia, much of the Middle East, and regions of Eastern Europe, establishing the largest contiguous empire ever seen. Although history tends to remember the Mongols as mass murderers and destroyers of cities, a more nuanced view reminds us that the Mongols also fostered trade, patronized the arts, promoted religious tolerance, and provided security and cultural unity across Eurasia. In this lecture and the next, we will look at the precedent for the Mongol invasions, the conquests themselves, and the process by which the Mongols ultimately became victims of their own success.

The Turkic Peoples

- The precedent for the Mongol invasions came from the Turkic peoples, who originated in the Altai Mountains of Central Asia. The Turks are renowned for several reasons, not the least of which is that they established an enormous Turkic Empire in Central Asia. Indeed, between the 6th and 8th centuries B.C.E., the Turks were powerful enough to compete with the Chinese for control of Central Asia.
- In 542 C.E., Chinese annals refer to a nomadic people who were in the process of building a great steppe empire, which eventually stretched from Mongolia all the way to the Black Sea. This first Turkic empire lasted from 552 to 581 C.E.
- But with the rise of the Tang dynasty in China, the Turks were forced to accept Tang hegemony for the next century. In 683, Turkic forces under the leadership of Khan Kutlugh defeated Tang forces and recaptured much of their original realm. This second Turkic empire lasted until 734 C.E.
- In the mid-8th century, the Turks entered a period of decline. As the Turks lost control of their empire to other Central Asian

peoples, such as the Uygurs, they began to migrate away from their homeland; moving to the southwest, they settled in Sogdia, to the north of modern-day Afghanistan.

- The steppe empires established by different Turkic-speaking peoples were well organized and were administered through a combination of tribal government traditions, centralized bureaucracies, and provincial governors. The Turks borrowed many of these ideas from the Chinese, particularly from the Tang, and many Turks also adopted Chinese-style Buddhism.
- Late in the 8th century, the religion of Islam came roaring into the steppes through a series of vigorous military campaigns that plunged deep into Central Asia, proffering an alternative to Chinese and Eastern civilizational influences. The Turks responded aggressively, launching invasions of the Middle East and India that lasted well into the 15th century, but at the same time, the Turks eventually converted to the religion of those they were attacking: Islam.
- Under a series of powerful leaders, the Turks defeated almost all who came up against them and ultimately established Islamic Turkish regimes from India to Turkey. The ability of the Turkic people to create and effectively administer vast regions of Inner Eurasia acted as an inspiration to Chinggis Khan and spurred the Mongols to try to emulate their achievements.
 - Early in the 13th century, the Mongols began their own campaign of conquest, and during the following century, they subdued much of Eurasia from Korea to the Danube River.
 - After building their enormous empire, the Mongols established what historians have come to recognize as the Pax Mongolica—the “Mongol Peace”—which facilitated trade and exchange across Eurasia for centuries after the Mongols had disappeared.
 - At roughly the same size as the former Soviet Union, the Mongol Empire was by far the largest empire the world had

known to that point, and it is still recognized today as the largest contiguous empire in all of world history.

Chinggis Khan (c. 1162–1227)

- Mongol success owed much to the guiding genius who launched his people into history: Chinggis Khan. The son of a minor Mongol chief, he was born around 1162 and named Temujin (“Man of Iron”).
- When his father was killed by enemies, Temujin spent years in exile on the steppes, gathering followers and using tribal war and diplomacy to patch together a new Mongol confederacy. In 1206, he was recognized as Chinggis Khan, a title that can be interpreted as “Great Ruler” or “Universal Ruler.”
- Chinggis began the era of unified Mongol imperial rule by launching his first campaigns of conquest against the Uyghurs and Tanguts in Central Asia and then against the Jin dynasty in northern China. By 1215, the Mongols had forced the Jin court to relocate and renamed their capital Khanbaliq (“city of the khan”). This became the capital of Mongol China.
- Leaving part of his army to control northern China, Chinggis Khan led Mongol forces west into parts of Afghanistan and eastern Persia. At the time, these Central Asian regions were still being ruled by Turks, specifically, the Khwarazm Turks.
 - The Mongols offered the Khwarazm shah the chance to avoid conquest and establish trade relations with the Mongols, but



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The human and infrastructure devastation wrought by Chinggis Khan and his Mongol forces was felt for centuries.

when the shah tried to have Chinggis Khan murdered, the Mongols sought revenge.

- In the end, the Khwarazm shah was killed and his armies were shattered. To make sure the Khwarazm state could never again challenge his own empire, Chinggis Khan then wreaked violent destruction on the region.
- By the time Chinggis Khan died in 1227, he had laid the foundations for a vast Mongol empire. Through his charisma and military skill, he had united the Mongols into a new confederation and established Mongol supremacy in northern China, Central Asia, and parts of Persia.
 - But Chinggis was content to rule through his control of the army and never attempted to establish any form of central government or provincial administration for his empire.
 - His heirs would continue the campaigns of expansion the great khan had started, but the burden now also fell on them to design a more durable imperial structure.
- Before his death, Chinggis divided the empire into four sections, or khanates, each to be administered by a son or grandson. He was succeeded as Great Khan by his third son, Ogedei, who was proclaimed supreme leader of the Mongols in 1229.
- Under Ogedei's leadership, Mongol expansion continued in all directions: deep into western Afghanistan and Persia, into China, far east into Korea, northwest into Armenia and Georgia, and deep into Eastern Europe. Only Ogedei's death may have prevented the complete conquest of Europe.
- After Ogedei's death, virtual civil war broke out among the other khans, and the four-khanate structure Chinggis had originally planned resulted in the division of the vast Mongol realm into four regional empires. For as long as the Mongol Empire existed, ambition fueled constant tensions among the four khans that controlled these regions.

The Four Khanates

- In the 1230s, under Ogedei, the Mongols of the Golden Horde launched invasions of Russia and Eastern Europe; these invasions continued after Ogedei's death in the 1240s. The Mongols raided small Russian states in the north but chose never to occupy the region, although they maintained hegemony over Russia until the mid-15th century.
- Further south, Chinggis's grandson Mongke led armies into Tibet between 1251 and 1259 and continued to harass Korea.
- At about the same time, Mongke's brother Hulegu defeated the Islamic Abbasid caliphate that controlled Persia, Palestine, and Syria. But in 1260, Hulegu's attempts to conquer all of the Middle East and Egypt were confounded when the Mongol tide in West Asia was stopped in Syria by the Egyptian Mamluk army.
- When it came to governing their vast realm, the Mongols adopted different tactics in the different lands they controlled. In Persia, they made major concessions to local interests; Mongols occupied all the highest positions, but Persians served as ministers, provincial governors, and high-ranking state officials. In essence, the Mongols allowed the Persians to administer the ilkhaneate so long as they delivered tax receipts to the Mongol rulers and maintained order.
 - Initially, the Mongol rulers observed their native shamanism, but they were remarkably tolerant of all faiths. In Persia, the Mongol elites gradually converted to Islam.
 - In 1295, Ilkhan Ghazan publicly embraced Islam, and most of the Mongols in Persia followed his lead.
 - The tide of Mongol religious tolerance turned at this point; Ghazan's conversion led to large-scale massacres of Christians and Jews and the restoration of Islam to its formerly privileged position in Persia.

- The conversion to Islam posed a problem for independent Mongol women, who agreed to adopt some aspects of Islamic women's culture but by no means all.

The Mongol Military

- The Mongol military force numbered, at best, perhaps 130,000 mounted warriors. How was it that this relatively small army was able to carve out the largest empire the world had seen?
- First, the Mongol military organization was incredibly effective because of its simplicity. Its structure was based on an ancient tradition of militarized steppe nomads and used the decimal system.
 - The smallest unit of the army was a squad of 10 men, called an *arban*.
 - Ten *arbans* constituted a company of 100, called a *jaghun*.
 - Ten *jaghuns* made up the equivalent of a regiment of 1,000—a *mingghan*.
 - Ten *mingghans* constituted a force of 10,000 mounted warriors—a *tumen*, the equivalent of a modern division.
- Military discipline also distinguished Mongol soldiers from their peers. All males from ages 15 to 60 and capable of undergoing rigorous training were eligible for conscription into the army.
- These forces were then exquisitely tailored for mobility and speed. To facilitate mobility, soldiers were lightly armored, and because they were adept at living off the land, Mongol units functioned independently of supply lines, dramatically speeding up their movement.
- Mongol campaigns were preceded by careful planning, reconnaissance, and the gathering of information on enemy territories and military strength. These advantages of organization,

mobility, and discipline also allowed the Mongol forces to fight on several fronts at once.

- In the cities they plundered, the Mongols were careful to recruit skilled military professionals. The experienced Chinese engineers Hulegu conscripted provided the Mongol forces with experts at building and operating a variety of siege machines.
- Another advantage the Mongols possessed was their ability to traverse great distances quickly, even in appallingly cold winters. Frozen rivers were like interstate highways to them, providing rapid passage into the heart of large urban settlements on the banks.
- Finally, we can't ignore the fact that the Mongols were also brutally skilled in their use of terror tactics to control conquered peoples, particularly in the early stages of expansion. Mongol commanders practiced mass murder, torture, and forced the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of conquered peoples.

Suggested Reading

Buell, *The A to Z of the Mongol World Empire*.

Morgan, *The Mongols*.

Schirokauer et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapter 9.

Questions to Consider

1. How were the Mongols, with relatively small military forces, able to create the largest contiguous empire ever seen in world history?
2. Were the Mongols terrorists or unifiers?

Shaking the Foundation—Mongols in the East

Lecture 36

In the last lecture, we considered the origins of the Mongols and followed their conquests through two major expansionary phases. In previous lectures, we have also considered the impact of the Mongols on Korea and the good fortune the Japanese enjoyed in avoiding Mongol invasion. In this lecture, we will focus more closely on the impact of the Mongols on Chinese history and culture—the heartland of Eastern civilization. We will then conclude by taking a world historian's perspective again, to consider the ramifications of the Mongol conquests on subsequent Eurasian and global history.

Government under the Mongols

- Although Chinggis Khan did not give any serious thought to imperial administration, the Mongols eventually learned to govern their empire. Under Khan Mongke, Mongol terror tactics were moderated, cultural differences of conquered peoples were accommodated, and thought was given to the skills required for competent imperial rule.
- During the reign of Mongke and his successors, the Mongols learned to mint coins, collect taxes in an orderly way, take censuses of the cities and states they controlled, and establish a courier system that connected the vast reaches of Eurasia. For commercial exchange, they regularized trade tolls, improved roads, and guaranteed merchant security.
- After centuries of fragmentation, the Silk Roads began to operate again, and much of Eurasia was effectively unified under Mongol rule. Government within the empire was often conducted by tributary vassal rulers who were rewarded with lavish gifts, and Mongol law was enforced by the constant threat of military retribution.

The Conquest of China

- As we have seen, the Mongols were not always the victors in their campaigns of conquest, but they were successful in China.
 - Chinggis Khan's early campaigns against the Jin dynasty were only the first step in a process that eventually resulted in the incorporation of all of China into the Mongol Empire.
 - In a series of violent and bloody campaigns between 1213 and 1220, Chinggis succeeded in bringing most of China north of the Huang He under Mongol control.
 - After the Great Khan died in 1227, his son Ogedei continued the attacks against the Jin, until the dynasty fell in 1234.
- Ogedei's younger brother, Tolui, had four sons, whose mother, Beki, ensured that they learned the arts of warfare, as well as reading and writing. Beki's oldest son, Mongke, became Great Khan of the Mongols, a position he held for only eight years before his death in 1259. Mongke was effectively the last khan to have supreme control over the Mongol world, which was then divided into the four khanates.
- Another son of Beki, Kublai Khan, was initially granted control of wealthy landed estates in northern China. Kublai worked hard to secure allies among the Jin and Han Chinese elites as he prepared to launch raids against the Song dynasty in the south.
- Kublai and Beki were effective and efficient administrators in northern China; they encouraged and supported farming, for example, to build a strong and reliable population of tax-paying farmers. For much of this period, Kublai was something of an absentee landlord, but gradually, he became more involved in the government of northern China.
- The first military campaigns against the Song began in 1258, led by Mongke Khan. After Mongke's death, civil war broke out among the Mongols; Kublai Khan claimed the title of Grand Khan in 1264,

but not all the hordes recognized his authority. Nonetheless, with his power secure in China, Kublai turned his full attention to the enormous riches and resources of the Southern Song.

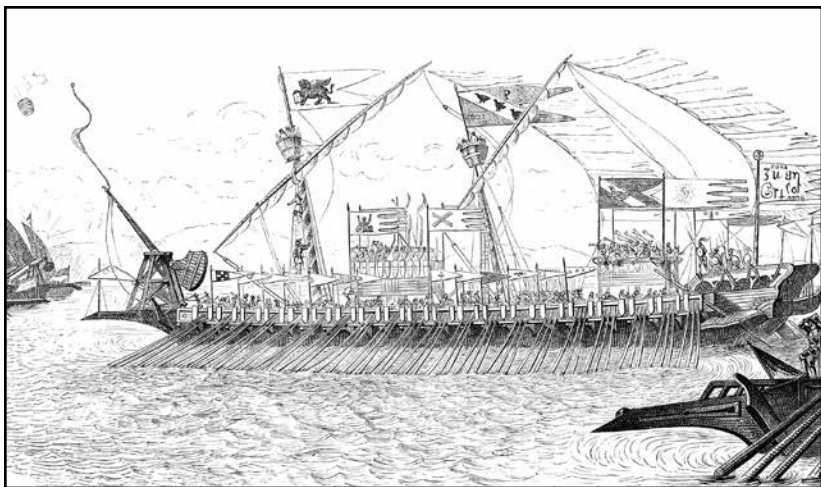
- Through a series of bloody and hard-won campaigns beginning in 1267, Kublai eventually defeated the well-armed Song forces. In 1271, he declared himself emperor of a reunited China, although the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou did not fall to Mongol forces until February 1276. Kublai chose the name Yuan for his new dynasty.

Mongol Rule in China

- Ruling a vast agricultural and commercial state was a new challenge for the Mongols. Never really trusting local Chinese administrators, Kublai and the later Yuan emperors tried to maintain political control and social stability by creating a balance of ethnic power in government and by combining Mongol and Chinese techniques of administration.
- The emperor and court centered their administration on the capital and ruled the provinces through subordinate officials, who were supervised by still other officials. To guard against the building of local power bases and regional autonomy, provincial administrators needed the permission of these imperial supervisors before any major decisions could be made.
- Kublai Khan dismantled the Confucian exam system that had provided China with high-quality bureaucrats for 1,500 years and brought many Persian and other West Asian Muslims to China, where they were given high administrative posts in the Yuan dynasty government.
- Despite the best efforts of Persian and Central Asian officials, history has judged the Yuan administration of China as inefficient. Although corruption was punished, the provinces were ruled with a considerable degree of independence and self-serving authority. Eventually, Mongol government became so lackadaisical that

Chinese Han officials employed to work with the Mongols openly criticized the government for its decentralization and inefficiency.

- Much of our knowledge of Chinese society under the Yuan comes from the famous Venetian traveler Marco Polo.
 - In 1271, accompanied by his father and uncle, the 17-year-old Marco set out on an epic journey across Asia, arriving at the court of Kublai Khan in 1275. According to Marco's later account, his skills and knowledge were so impressive to the great emperor that Kublai Khan employed him for the next 17 years as a trusted adviser, which allowed Marco to observe a great deal about Chinese society and government.
 - The descriptions of the Chinese court and way of life provided later in the *Travels of Marco Polo* seemed so absurd to 13th-century European readers that they were dismissed as lies. But Polo's accounts of the great canals, granaries, social services, advanced technology, and even regular bathing of the Chinese were so astonishing that his book became a bestseller.



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Scholars estimate that Marco Polo probably traveled a total of 15,000 miles on his journeys to and from Asia.

The Decline of the Mongols

- By the late 13th century, economic problems beset several parts of the Mongol Empire. In Persia, excessive spending gradually drained the treasury, and tax revenues began to dry up.
 - In the early 1290s the ilkhans tried to resolve these financial difficulties by introducing paper money, but merchants closed their shops rather than accept the currency, and commerce ground to a halt.
 - After the death of Ilkhan Ghazan in 1304, the dynasty went into a steep decline, blighted by intense factional disputes.
 - When the last Mongol ruler of Persia died without an heir in 1335, the ilkhanate collapsed, and local governors then ruled Persia until the arrival of the Turks late in the 14th century.
- Similar financial problems beset the Yuan administration in China at about the same time. Paper money was also used in China, but the Yuan did not maintain adequate reserves of bullion to back the currency. People quickly began to lose confidence in the economy as prices rose sharply.
 - From the 1320s on, power struggles, assassinations, and civil wars blighted Mongol China.
 - In the midst of this chaos, a nationalist rebellion broke out in the south in 1352, led by a young Buddhist ruler named Hongwu. As we will see, Hongwu went on to establish the powerful Ming dynasty, which would rule China until 1644.
 - In 1368, Hongwu's forces captured the Yuan capital, and the Mongols departed China for good. Under the Ming, government was stabilized and China was defended from further invasion for three centuries.

Impact of the Mongols

- From the early days of their empire, the Mongols prized commercial and trade relationships with neighboring economies,

and they continued this policy during the cycles of expansion and consolidation that followed.

- The well-traveled and well-maintained roads through the Mongol Empire linked lands from the Mediterranean basin to China, just as in the heyday of the first great Silk Roads era.
- But we should also note that the Mongol Empire had a negligible influence on seaborne trade. Because maritime trade was much greater, both in value and volume, than overland trade, historians now intensely debate whether the century of Mongol rule really did have a profound impact on trans-Eurasian cultural exchange.
- It is indisputable, however, that during the century-long Pax Mongolica, East and West Eurasia were closer than ever before. This was mostly attributable to the encouragement of travel and communication by Mongol rulers, who established a courier network across Eurasia and maintained diplomatic relationships among themselves and with rulers of other states.
- Just as in the earlier Silk Roads eras, trans-Eurasian trade routes during the Mongol era also served as highways for the transmission of religions through missionaries.
- Although the Mongols are justifiably renowned for the slaughter and havoc wrought by their invasions, historians today tend to focus more on the stability and connections established by Mongol control of their vast empire.
- The Mongols encouraged trade and borrowed from established civilizations, helping to spread the technological knowledge of Eastern civilization from China to Europe, with dramatic implications for subsequent world history.
- The Pax Mongolica also gave Europeans a new awareness of the wider world, which acted as a powerful spur to European exploration, expansion, and, ultimately, colonization.

- Several times in this course, we have considered the critical role of militarized steppe nomadic peoples in diffusing Eastern culture and technology to the West and Western religions and beliefs to the East. In the 13th and 14th centuries, it was the Mongols who facilitated an intensive exchange of goods and ideas that helped lead directly to the emergence of a premodern “world system.” This system was the forerunner to the emergence of capitalism, enhanced global connections, and the subsequent age of European hegemony.
- But the largest empire ever seen was fleeting and could not endure because of logistical problems and difficulties of imperial administration; thus, the mighty Mongols slipped quietly from the great stage of world history.
- Despite all the negatives associated with the rule of pastoral nomads and other outsiders, Chinese civilization actually gained something during its period of Mongol domination: a confidence in its ability to survive, to bend just enough to ward off the worst blows and defeats that these alien “barbarians” could inflict.
 - Far from the court of Kublai Khan, Confucian and Daoist teachings continued, and circles of artists and poets found ways to maintain confidence in the core foundational ideas of Eastern civilization.
 - In the next lecture, we’ll see how this hidden repository of distinctive culture would resurface to guide China’s fortunes during 300 years of Ming dynasty rule.

Suggested Reading

Buell, *The A to Z of the Mongol World Empire*.

Moule and Pelliot, *Marco Polo*.

Tanner, *China: A History*, chapter 8.

Questions to Consider

1. What were some of the impacts of Mongol rule on Chinese society and culture?
2. Why did the Silk Roads revive under the Mongols, and what was the impact of this revival on Eastern (and Western) civilization?

The Rise of the Ming

Lecture 37

The Ming dynasty is perhaps best known for its famous porcelain and other artistic achievements, but it should also be recognized for the remarkable job it did in stabilizing Chinese fortunes and preserving many of the foundational elements and ideas of Eastern civilization when they threatened to unravel. However, as we will see in this lecture and the next, this stabilization and preservation came at an enormous cost and ultimately resulted in the surrendering of Chinese power, innovation, and global leadership to the new and rising power of world history: the Europeans.

The Early Ming Period

- After the Yuan dynasty collapsed in the mid-14th century because of internal dissent and pressure from peasant uprisings, the Ming dynasty moved quickly to restore native rule to China.
- Hongwu, the leader of the uprising against the Yuan, ruled as the first Ming emperor, from 1368 to 1398. Hongwu chose the name Ming (“brilliant”) for the new dynasty, and after driving the Mongols out, he set to work to build a tightly centralized Chinese-run state.
- As emperor, Hongwu made extensive use of a new class of bureaucrat called mandarins. These were imperial government officials whose job was to travel throughout the land and supervise the implementation of government policies. Hongwu also placed great trust in eunuchs; indeed, three of the most famous eunuchs in China’s long history served the imperial court during the Ming dynasty.
 - One of these was the great Muslim admiral Zheng He; another was Liu Jin, who served Prince Zhu Houzhao and whose corrupt behavior is blamed by historians for seriously undermining the credibility of the Ming dynasty.

- The third famous eunuch of the Ming was Wei Zhongxian, an illiterate former hoodlum who used the art of flattery to get close to Emperor Wanli.
- One of Hongwu's finest successors was Emperor Yongle (r. 1403–1424). He is renowned for launching a series of naval expeditions that sailed throughout the Indian Ocean basin and showed Chinese colors as far away as East Africa. These expeditions were led by the eunuch admiral Zheng He.
- Yongle's successors discontinued these expensive maritime expeditions but maintained the tightly centralized state that Hongwu had established. One of the reasons the expeditions were stopped is that the Ming emperors were determined to prevent new invasions of China. In particular, they were concerned about the Mongols, who remained active and dangerous to the north of the Great Wall. Because of this concern, in 1421, Yongle decided to move the early Ming capital from Nanjing back to Beijing.
- The early Ming emperors commanded powerful armies that were able to keep the Mongols under control militarily, but later emperors were far less able and efficient, and by the mid-15th century, Ming military forces had lost much of their effectiveness. Later Ming emperors, in their desperation to protect their realm from Mongols and other militarized nomads, rebuilt and extended the Great Wall system.



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In their desperation to keep out the Mongols and with an increasingly less effective military, the Ming administration made the reconstruction of the Great Wall a major defensive priority.

- The defensive policies pursued by the Ming rulers were part of a larger determination to eradicate Mongol—and, indeed, any foreign—cultural influence from China and to create a stable society in the image of the classical Chinese past.
 - With Ming government encouragement, individuals gave up the Mongol names and dress they had adopted under the Yuan.
 - The government sponsored the study of Chinese cultural traditions that the Mongols had suppressed or ignored, especially Confucianism. Imperial academies and regional colleges were established throughout China to teach the foundational ideas and philosophies of Eastern civilization.
 - Most importantly, the Ming restored the civil service exam system that the Mongols had dismantled.

Weakening of the Ming

- The vigor of the early Ming emperors, such as Hongwu and Yongle, did not survive beyond the mid-16th century, after a series of problems combined to weaken the dynasty.
- One of the most difficult challenges the government had to deal with was an outbreak of vicious piracy in the Yellow and South China seas.
 - For several decades between the 1520s and 1560s, pirates and smugglers, mostly based in Japan, operated almost at will along the east coast of China.
 - The Ming navy and coastal defenses proved woefully ineffective in dealing with the outbreak; conflicts with pirate gangs severely disrupted coastal regions and, sometimes, well into the interior.
- We can see further evidence of ineptitude in the fact that the later Ming emperors lived more and more extravagantly in the Forbidden City, a vast imperial enclave built in the heart of Beijing.

- The Forbidden City was built between 1406 and 1420; engineers estimate it probably required 1 million conscripted laborers to construct. When completed, the complex contained 980 separate buildings and covered an area of close to 8 million square feet!
- Walking through the Forbidden City, it is easy to imagine the Ming emperors living their sheltered lives deep inside this vast complex, receiving news about the outside world only through eunuchs and servant administrators, news that was heavily filtered and censored.
- Most later Ming emperors adapted to the situation by ignoring government affairs while satisfying their various appetites for wine, women, and other pleasures.
- When a series of famines struck China in the early 17th century, the government proved itself incapable of organizing relief efforts. As the famine worsened and no aid was forthcoming from Beijing, the desperate peasants resorted to eating grass roots and tree bark. By the 1630s, angry peasants were organizing revolts; as they gathered momentum, city after city withdrew its loyalty from the Ming.
- At the same time, Manchu invaders in north seized the opportunity to invade China by joining forces with the peasants in a concerted attack on the Ming. By the early 1640s, the combined rebel and Manchu forces controlled much of China, and they turned in a calculated pincer movement toward Beijing. The last emperor of the Ming was so sheltered by court eunuchs and mandarins that he had no idea of the seriousness of the situation until it was far too late.
- In April 1644, with the forces of rebel leader Li Zicheng about to capture Beijing, the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen, organized a feast and invited all the members of the imperial household except his sons to attend. Using his sword, he killed all of them to prevent them from falling into rebel hands. Then, still wearing

his glorious imperial costume, he ran outside and hanged himself from a Japanese pagoda tree. The forces of Li Zicheng captured the inner city.

Imperial Administration under the Ming

- Both the Ming and later Qing dynasties attempted, at least in their early days, to preside over a well-organized and tightly centralized state. The actual administration of the empire was handled by a vast bureaucracy staffed by Confucian scholars. With this structure in place, for more than 500 years, the autocratic state created by Hongwu governed China's fortunes.
- According to the ancient tradition of Eastern civilization, the emperor was the "son of heaven," a human being designated by heavenly powers to maintain order on earth and blessed to wear the mandate of heaven.
 - The emperor lived a privileged life within the Forbidden City, with hundreds of concubines and thousands of eunuchs to take care of his every desire. His day was completely orchestrated, and all performances in which he participated carefully choreographed.
 - Everything about the emperor's person and the institution he represented conveyed a sense of awesome authority. His clothes and personal effects bore designs forbidden to other people, and the written characters of the emperor's name were taboo throughout China.
- Below the emperor and the imperial eunuchs, the day-to-day governing of China was the job of scholar-bureaucrats, the most senior of whom had been personally appointed by the emperor. In the best tradition of Confucianism, these men had earned academic degrees by passing rigorous civil service examinations.
 - Under the Ming, preparations for the Confucian exams began at an early age. Sometimes, classes in the classics took place in local schools, which (like the exams themselves) were open only to males. However, the fact that wealthy families

employed tutors to help their sons prepare for the exams also made formal education available for girls.

- By the time students were 10 or 11 years old, they had memorized the several thousand Chinese written-language characters that were necessary to deal with Confucian literature, including the *Analects* and all of the Zhou dynasty classics.
- Candidates also studied calligraphy, poetry, and essay writing and had to know a large corpus of commentaries, histories, and literary works that had been written on the classics over the previous 2,000 years.
- The examinations themselves consisted of a series of tests administered at different levels: district, provincial, and metropolitan. Stiff quotas restricted the number of successful candidates in each exam.
- The actual writing of the exam was a grueling process. For three days and two nights, candidates wrote essays in eight sections. There were no interruptions and no communication between candidates; if a candidate died during the exam, his body was wrapped in straw and tossed over the compound walls for his family to come and collect!
- Of course, the possibility of high bureaucratic service (with rich financial and social rewards) meant that despite the grueling nature of the exams, competition for degrees was ferocious at all levels. Those who passed only the district-level exams usually spent their careers as teachers or private tutors. But those who passed the metropolitan exams could at least hope for powerful positions in the imperial bureaucracy.
- By opening the door to the possibility of honor, power, and rewards, the exam system encouraged the serious pursuit of higher education. China under the Ming was undoubtedly

the most highly educated society that had ever existed to this point in world history.

- The system also molded the personal values of those who governed China by ensuring that the ethical philosophy of Confucianism remained at the heart of Chinese education and government, as it had done off and on for more than 2,000 years.
- By driving out the Mongols, Ming China was able to control its own affairs throughout the early modern era; in so doing, it avoided the sort of turmoil that afflicted the Americas and Africa after the arrival of the Europeans.
- As we'll see in the next lecture, for several decades in the early 15th century, the government provided state support for an astonishing burst of naval expeditions, but after that, later Ming emperors moved to restrict foreign expeditions and the access of foreign merchants and missionaries to China.

Suggested Reading

Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy*.

Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, chapter 8.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the Ming centralize power in the hands of the emperor, and what was the impact of this on later imperial Chinese politics?
2. In what way did the civil service exam system practiced by the Ming ensure that the ethical philosophy of Confucianism remained at the heart of Chinese education and government, as it had done off and on for more than 2,000 years before the Ming?

Great Treasure Fleets of the Ming

Lecture 38

As we saw in the last lecture, after driving out the Mongols, the Ming dynasty built a powerful centralized state and worked to restore the traditional values of Eastern civilization. In this lecture, we'll pick up the story in the early 15th century, when Chinese fleets ruled the oceans of the Eastern hemisphere. We will explore the impact of these voyages and the ramifications of the decision made by later emperors to disengage from exploration at precisely the same moment that Europeans were stepping out on the world stage. We'll conclude the lecture with a few remarks about the verdict Chinese and world historians have delivered on the ultimate impact of the Ming on both Eastern civilization and global history.

Ming Maritime Expeditions

- Between 1405 and 1433, the eunuch admiral Zheng He sailed on seven maritime expeditions.
 - Zheng He was born in Yunnan province to Chinese Muslim parents who named him Ma He. Captured by a Ming army attempting to put down a provincial uprising, Ma He was castrated and placed as a servant in the household of the current emperor's fourth son, Prince Zhu Di.
 - Because eunuchs were unable to father children and, thus, establish their own powerful families, they were trusted with sensitive government positions. Ma He proved himself to be an exceptionally competent assistant and military adviser to the prince, who renamed him Zheng He.
 - When Prince Zhu Di came to power as Emperor Yongle in 1403, he became intrigued by the possibility of extending Ming prestige throughout the region by sponsoring diplomatic and exploratory maritime expeditions.

- The emperor authorized Zheng He to oversee the construction of a fleet of massive “treasure ships” and to plan the expeditions.
- The first expedition embarked in July 1405 from Liujia Harbor near Suzhou. Its mission was threefold: to establish relations with foreign countries, to expand trade contacts, and to look for exotic treasures for Yongle and the imperial court.
- Under the command of Admiral Zheng He was a fleet of 62 ships manned by more than 27,800 men, including sailors, clerks, interpreters, officers and soldiers, artisans, medical men, meteorologists, and others.
 - The fleet included ships that carried nothing but horses and others that carried water, along with supply ships, troop transports, naval fighting ships, and a host of other specialized vessels.
 - The cargo was so extensive that it had to be broken down into more than 40 different categories: silk goods, porcelain, gold and silver ware, copper utensils, iron implements, cotton goods, mercury, umbrellas, straw mats, and more.
- This massive fleet sailed ponderously south along the coast of Fujian, then visited Vietnam, Java, and Malacca. From there, Zheng He crossed the eastern Indian Ocean to visit Sri Lanka and several trading cities on the south coast of India.
- Wherever his ships sailed on this expedition, and the six that followed, they collected rare treasures to bring back to China and demanded that local rulers recognize the power and dominion of the Ming dynasty and Emperor Yongle.
- On the return journey, the fleet sailed back across the Indian Ocean to the islands of Indonesia but was held up there for several months battling pirates near Sumatra. The fleet returned triumphantly to the port of Nanjing in 1407, after a voyage of two years.

- Over a period of 28 years between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He eventually led seven separate maritime expeditions to some 30 different countries and regions to the south and west of China. Subsequent voyages traveled to Yemen, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Mecca, and many ports along the East African coast.
- Zheng He intervened in local conflicts in Sumatra and Ceylon, suppressed piracy in Southeast Asia, intimidated local authorities in Arabia and Africa, and generally made China's presence strongly felt throughout the Indian Ocean. He may have traveled as far south as the Cape of Good Hope, but there is no evidence that he crossed the Pacific to the Americas.
- After the reign of Yongle, Zheng He's faction fell out of favor in court, and the Ming government decided to withdraw its support for expensive maritime expeditions, partly because some scholar-bureaucrats argued that they violated the principles of Confucianism.
 - The government ultimately moved to suppress all knowledge of the fleet and its expeditions. Zheng He probably died on his last voyage and was buried at sea.
 - Conservative Confucian factions in the Ming government even tried to ban Chinese merchants from dealing with foreign people, and eventually, the Qing government tried to outlaw maritime travel altogether!
- With the end of the voyages, the world lost the chance to see how differently global history might have played out if the Chinese rather than the Portuguese had come to dominate Indian Ocean trade or what might have happened if the Chinese had reached the Americas before Columbus!

Continuing Maritime Trade

- Even though official support for Zheng He's expeditions dried up, maritime trade continued to play a significant role in the Chinese economy. Indeed, despite the objections of conservative Confucian

officials during the Ming and early Qing dynastic eras, burgeoning global trade brought tremendous prosperity to China.

- To feed an insatiable demand for Chinese exports, Chinese workers labored to produce vast quantities of silk, porcelain, lacquer ware, and tea for consumers in the Indian Ocean basin, the Islamic world, and even Europe. The volume of imports was much lower than that of exports.
- Payment for Chinese exports was usually demanded in the form of silver bullion, which supported a silver-based economy. As we will see in our lectures on the Qing dynasty, this insistence on silver bullion for payment led to a global Chinese monopoly on silver, which increased resentment on the part of foreign merchants at the one-sided nature of the trade. This resentment would have disastrous consequences for China in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- All this commercial growth and expansion took place in an atmosphere of tight government control, but of course, as we have seen, once China began to connect with the world, it was impossible to control the flow of ideas into the state. Among the foreign ideas coming from Europe was Christianity.

Christianity in China

- As we have seen, Christianity had been in China for a long time before the Ming dynasty came to power, but it had disappeared after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty with the Ming's insistence on promoting core Chinese ideologies. Thus, when Roman Catholic missionaries returned in the 16th century, they had to start more or less from scratch in their efforts to reestablish a Christian community.
- The most prominent missionaries of the Ming period were the Jesuits, who worked hard to strengthen Catholicism in Europe and to spread the faith abroad. The founder of the Jesuit mission to China was the Italian Matteo Ricci, who had declared the goal of converting all of China to Christianity, beginning at the top with

then-emperor Wanli. To this end, he spent almost 20 years studying the Chinese language and Confucian texts.

- Ricci and his colleagues dazzled their hosts in China with both their intellects and their mastery of European science and technology. The Jesuits were able to correct Chinese calendars that consistently miscalculated solar eclipses. They prepared accurate maps of the world with China at the center and even supervised the casting of high-quality bronze cannons for both the Ming and Qing dynasties.

- Of course, the ultimate goal of the Jesuits was to win converts to Christianity. To facilitate this, they portrayed Christianity as a high faith similar to the greatest achievements of the Eastern cultural tradition. Matteo Ricci wrote a treatise called *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, in which he argued that the doctrines of Jesus and Confucius were similar. He further suggested that the adoption of Christianity would represent a return to a purer and more original form of Confucianism.



The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci spent almost 20 years immersing himself in Chinese-language and Confucian texts; he became a popular figure in the Ming court.

- The Jesuits held their Christian services in the Chinese language and allowed converts to continue the practice of ancestor worship, but ultimately, they attracted few converts to Christianity, at least partly because the Chinese disliked the “exclusive” nature of Christianity. Like Islam, Christianity claimed to be the only true religion; thus, conversion implied that other creeds, such as Buddhism or Daoism, were wrong, an idea most Chinese were unwilling to accept.

- Ultimately, it wasn't the failure to attract converts that brought an end to the Roman Catholic mission to China but competition for converts and squabbles among the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans. In response to the pope's commands that all missionaries suppress ancestor worship and conduct services in European languages, the Qing emperor Kangxi ordered an end to the preaching of Christianity in China. By the mid-18th century, the Christian missions had all but disappeared.
- Even though the Roman Catholic mission to China did not convert large numbers of Chinese, it did have important cultural and historical ramifications, for both Europe and China.
 - Besides making European science and technology known in China, the Jesuits also made China known to Europe. In letters, reports, and other writings distributed widely throughout Europe, the Jesuits described China as an orderly and rational society.
 - The Confucian civil service exam system attracted the attention of European rulers, who began to design their own civil service bureaucracies in the 18th century.
 - The rational moral philosophy of Confucius, first translated into Latin by Jesuits, also appealed to the Enlightenment philosophers of Europe, who began to seek alternatives to Christianity as the foundation for ethics and morality.

Conclusions about the Ming

- The Ming period tends to be judged harshly by both Chinese and Western historians today, who struggle to find any significant achievements or "historical heroes" from the period.
- Historians argue that Ming government suffered because of tensions in the bureaucratic system between absolute monarchs and their advisers and surrogates, divisions that reached a point that effectively demobilized the government.

- From a global perspective, the Ming period is viewed not only as weak and inefficient but as a dead weight that slowed Chinese innovation and entrepreneurship just when real global competition from Europeans was about to surface.
- Still, it's important to note that the arbitrary behavior of emperors and eunuchs did little to affect village life. The Chinese population in general grew and became more literate through the widespread dissemination of printed materials; this tended to strengthen the ties of common beliefs, shared history, and core ideologies within the village and town communities.
- At the same time, various new regions, such as Yunnan and Guizhou, were also effectively absorbed into the enormous Chinese state. And we should not forget that the Ming preserved peace within and outside China for more than two centuries—no mean feat in an increasingly hostile world.

Suggested Reading

Hook and Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of China*.

Hsia, "The Catholic Mission and Translations in China, 1583–1700."

Plaks, *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*.

Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the Ming attempt to withdraw from international affairs and return China to a state of relative isolation, and how successful were they?
2. Despite the efforts of brilliant Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, why did Christianity ultimately fail to attract significant numbers of converts in China?

The Qing—Nomads Return from the North

Lecture 39

The Manchus were descended from the pastoral nomads who had had such a profound impact on Chinese and Korean history. There had been frequent clashes over the centuries between Chinese and Manchus over land and resources along the borderlands of southern Manchuria and northern China, with the Chinese generally having the upper hand. But during the late 16th century, an ambitious chieftain named Nurhachi unified the Manchu tribes and changed the name of his people from Hou Jin (“later Jin”) to Qing (“clear”). During the 1620s and 1630s, the Manchu army began launching small-scale invasions into northern China, and by 1644, the Qing Manchus had captured Beijing and seized the throne of China for themselves.

Emergence of the Qing

- In the 1630s, after a series of famines in China, angry peasants began organizing revolts; as they gathered momentum, city after city withdrew its loyalty from the Ming. The Qing Manchus from the north decided to seize the moment and join forces with the peasants in a concerted attack on the Ming government.
- By the early 1640s, the combined rebel and Manchu forces controlled much of China and turned to the capital, Beijing, for their final assault. After the last Ming emperor killed most of his family and himself, the Manchus quickly overwhelmed the remaining Chinese forces—including their peasant allies.
- After seizing control of Beijing, the Manchu forces began a long campaign aimed at the complete subjugation of all China under Manchu hegemony. By the early 1680s, they had achieved this goal and were intent on creating an enormous empire based on the ancient Chinese model.

- The establishment of the Qing dynasty was a product of Ming ineptitude and the formidable military prowess of the Manchus but also partly of the support of many Han Chinese for the Manchu invaders. In fact, we know of several Chinese generals who deserted the Ming dynasty in the 1630s and 1640s because of its corruption and inefficiency.
 - Confucian scholar-bureaucrats also worked against the Ming because they detested the eunuchs who had dominated the imperial court, and they hoped that the Qing would restore scholars to their formerly favored position in government.
 - At the same time, the Manchu ruling elites were well schooled in the Chinese language and Confucianism; because of this and their generally respectful attitude toward the ancient traditions of Eastern civilization, the Qing elites enjoyed more respect from scholar-bureaucrats than did the Ming emperor or his administration.
- Although certainly respectful of Chinese traditions, the Manchus were also careful to preserve their own ethnic and cultural identity. They outlawed intermarriage between Manchus and Chinese, for example, and forbade Chinese from traveling to Manchuria or learning the Manchurian language.
- Despite these measures aimed at separating ethnic Han and Manchu, until the 19th century, the strong imperial leadership practiced by the Qing rulers muted any outbreaks of ethnic tension between Manchu leaders and their Chinese subjects.

Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong

- The long reigns of two particularly effective rulers—Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) and his grandson Qianlong (r. 1736–1795)—brilliantly illustrate the ability of the Manchus to maintain their hold on China through potent leadership. During the reigns of these two emperors, Qing China reached the height of its power, prosperity, and size.

- Kangxi was a superb scholar and an enlightened ruler, well versed in the finest traditions of Eastern civilization. He had studied the Confucian classics and genuinely tried to apply their teachings to his policies.
 - As well as being a scholar, poet, and ethical ruler, Kangxi was also a military leader and conqueror; it was under him that the Qing constructed its vast empire.
 - Kangxi conquered the island of Taiwan, where Ming loyalists had retreated after their expulsion from southern China, and absorbed it into the empire. Then, like the Han and Tang emperors before him, he tried to head off problems with militarized nomads by extending Chinese influence deep into Central Asia. Eventually, his conquests in Mongolia and Inner Asia extended almost to the Caspian Sea.
 - Kangxi then turned Tibet into a Chinese protectorate, defeating a coalition of Mongolian tribes there known as the Dzungars.
- Kangxi's grandson Qianlong continued to expand Chinese influence in Central Asia. He sought to consolidate Kangxi's conquests



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The Qing emperor Kangxi generously patronized Confucian schools and academies, and many important studies of Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and philology were published during his reign.

in Central Asia by establishing military garrisons in Turkestan (the modern province of Xinjiang). He also encouraged Chinese merchants to settle in Central Asia in the hope that they would stabilize the region and help spread Chinese culture and language.

- In Tibet, Qianlong supported and backed the Dalai Lama and placed a Qing garrison in Lhasa to protect his legitimacy and power.
- Not content with these Central Asian conquests, Qianlong also made Vietnam and Nepal vassal states of the Qing, although a war against Burma ended in complete failure for the Chinese.
- Overall, Qianlong's military expansion nearly doubled the size of the already vast empire and brought into the fold many non-Han Chinese peoples. But these campaigns were tremendously expensive enterprises; virtually all the funds in the imperial treasury had to be put into military expeditions.
- Though the wars were successful, they were not overwhelmingly so, and the army's efficiency declined noticeably in the face of some challenging enemies; by the end of the various frontier wars, the army was considerably weakened. Despite this, most historians still regard Qianlong's reign as the high point of the Qing dynasty.
- Like his grandfather, Qianlong was a sophisticated and learned man. He was a major patron of the arts and saw himself as an important "preserver and restorer" of Chinese culture. Qianlong was also a poet and a writer of prose, but at the same time, he sought to destroy all writings that were anti-Qing or that might incite rebellions.
- During Qianlong's long, stable, and prosperous reign, China was an incredibly wealthy state. The imperial treasury contained so much wealth that on at least four different occasions, the emperor canceled all tax collections for the year!

- However, toward the end of his reign, Qianlong began paying less attention to imperial affairs and delegated many government responsibilities to his favorite eunuchs. He ultimately resigned the throne at age 85, although he retained power until his death four years later.

Population Growth and Economic Development

- For most of its incredibly long history, China has been a predominantly agricultural country, which fits well with Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist ideas about the land and farming. The Qing emperor reinforced the central importance of agriculture by personally plowing the first furrows of the farming season.
- Yet only a fraction of China's land is suitable for farming; thus, farmers were forced to rely on intensive and productive market-garden agriculture. Still, on this strong farming foundation, China was able to build the most commercialized farming economy of the preindustrial world. By intensively cultivating every parcel of land, Chinese peasants were able to increase their annual yields of rice, wheat, and millet well into the 17th century.
- From the mid-17th century on, just as farmers were reaching the upper limits of agricultural productivity using native crops, Spanish merchants from the Philippines began to introduce American food crops, such as maize, sweet potatoes, and peanuts, into China. Chinese farmers were able to grow these crops on land that wasn't suited to indigenous crops. The increased food supply, of course, led to higher populations.
- Scholars estimate that the population of China in 1500 was around 100 million; by 1750, despite intervening plagues and war, it had reached 225 million, and by the early 1800s, it was a staggering 360 million. This demographic explosion set the stage for dynamic economic growth, but it also created economic and social problems, because agricultural growth could not keep pace over the long term.

- Although a growing population placed pressure on Chinese resources, particularly food, the expanding commercial market also offered opportunities for entrepreneurs. Further, after the mid-16th century, the Chinese economy benefited substantially from the influx of Japanese and American silver, which stimulated trade and financed expansion.
- In the 17th century, in attempting to pacify southern China, the Qing government made an abortive attempt to end all maritime activity; however, small Chinese vessels continued to trade actively with Japan and Southeast Asia. When southern China was finally pacified in the 1680s, the strictest measures were rescinded, but Qing authorities closely supervised the activities of all foreign merchants in China.
- As well as limiting the activities of foreign merchants, the Qing also discouraged the organization of large-scale commercial ventures by Chinese merchants; this was ultimately the longest-lasting and most significant result of both Ming and Qing isolationist policies.
 - Without government approval, it was impossible to maintain shipyards that could construct large vessels, like the massive ships that Zheng He had sailed across the Indian Ocean.
 - It was also impossible to organize large trading companies like the English East India Company or the Dutch VOC, which put Chinese merchants at a considerable global disadvantage.
 - We have evidence that thousands of Chinese merchants continued to link China into the global trading network, albeit without the government's approval and, thus, at a significant disadvantage to their European competitors.
- Much of the Chinese economic expansion took place in the absence of technological innovation. As we have seen, under the Southern Song, engineers produced a flood of extraordinary inventions, and China was the world's leader in science and technological innovation. But under the Ming and Qing, innovation slowed, and the Chinese started borrowing ideas from the West.

- Under the Song, the imperial government had encouraged innovation as the foundation for military and economic strength.
- But both the Ming and Qing governments and the Confucian scholar-bureaucrats at the heart of their administrations favored political and social stability over innovation, which they feared would lead to unsettling change.
- The abundance and ready availability of cheap, skilled workers also discouraged technological innovation. If employers wanted to increase production, it was cheaper to hire more workers than to make large investments in new technology.
- In the short term, this maintained relative prosperity in China and helped keep employment rates high. But in the long term, the ultimate result of these developments was that China lost technological ground to the Europeans, who embarked on a round of stunning innovations beginning in the mid-18th century. The essential conservatism of the Ming and Qing dynasties caused China to withdraw from the world at precisely the same moment that the Western powers were aggressively engaging in it!

Suggested Reading

Chen, *China and the West*.

Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*.

Questions to Consider

1. How, under such emperors as Kangxi and Qianlong, were the Qing able to construct the greatest empire China ever possessed?
2. Why did technological and intellectual innovation in China slow under the Ming and Qing?

The Qing—The Last Emperor of China

Lecture 40

In 1759, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty moved to restrict European commercial presence in the great southern port city of Guangzhou, which had been home to thousands of foreign merchants for about 1,000 years. Qing authorities were determined to bring the activities of foreign merchants more closely under government control and to more tightly regulate the terms of trade, which had become increasingly independent of Qing authority. By the late 18th century, seeking ways to increase their profits and in response to these restrictive Chinese trade practices, officials of the British East India Company began to look for alternatives to silver to exchange for Chinese goods. They settled on a profitable but highly illegal drug: opium.

The Opium Trade

- In the late 18th century, British merchants began to purchase cheap opium from India and ship it to China, using the drug as a substitute for silver to buy Chinese products. The trade in opium was illegal, of course, but it continued unabated for decades because the Chinese made little effort to enforce the law. The lack of enforcement stemmed partly from the fact that Chinese officials also benefited enormously from the trade and partly because no one in the Qing government wanted to risk an all-out confrontation with the British merchants.
- By the late 1830s, the Chinese government was acutely aware that the opium trade was draining massive amounts of silver bullion from China and was having major social consequences, particularly in southern China, where addiction was widespread.
- When Qing government officials took tentative steps to stop the illicit trade in 1838, British merchants immediately started losing money.
 - Qing efforts were stepped up the following year, when an incorruptible official named Lin Zexu was put in charge of

attempts to destroy the opium trade altogether. He confiscated and destroyed 20,000 chests of British-owned opium and arrested 1,600 foreign merchants and Chinese accomplices.

- Outraged by Chinese action against them, British commercial agents pressed their government for a military response. The ensuing conflict is known as the Opium Wars.
- In the opening stages of the conflict, British naval gunboats demonstrated their clear superiority, but even so, the Chinese refused to sue for peace. In June 1842, British forces broke the stalemate with an armada of 70 ships heading up the Yangtze River. By the time it arrived at the intersection with the Grand Canal, the Chinese had sued for peace.
- China experienced similar military setbacks throughout the remainder of the 19th century, against Britain and France in the 1850s, France again in the 1880s, and Japan in 1894 and 1895. In the wake of these defeats, the Qing government was forced to sign several humiliating treaties that curtailed Chinese sovereignty.
 - The most famous of these treaties was forced on the Qing by the British, the Treaty of Nanjing. Under this treaty, China agreed to cede the island of Hong Kong to Britain, to open five ports to British commerce and residence, to grant most-favored-nation status to Britain, and to pay reparations to merchants whose chests of opium had been burned.
 - Later, France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, the United States, and Japan all reached similar unequal treaties with China.
 - Collectively, these treaties legalized the opium trade, permitted the reestablishment of Christian missions throughout China, opened treaty ports, and prevented the Qing government from levying tariffs on imports of foreign goods.

The Taiping Rebellion

- This humiliating debilitation of the Chinese empire in the late 19th century was as much due to internal problems as it was to foreign intrusion and demands. Large-scale rebellions in the 19th century reflected the people's increasing poverty and discontent with the government. The most dangerous of all the peasant uprisings was the Taiping Rebellion, which lasted from 1851 to 1864 and brought the Qing dynasty to the brink of collapse.
- The catalyst for this rebellion was a schoolteacher named Hong Xiuquan, who became convinced that he had been sent to earth by God to expel the Manchu Qing from China. In 1851, Hong's call for the destruction of the Qing dynasty and the radical transformation of Chinese society appealed to millions.
- The Taiping reform program called for the abolition of private property, communal wealth to be shared according to need, prohibitions on foot-binding and concubinage, free public education, establishment of democratic political institutions, and more.
- After sweeping through southeast China, Hong and his followers captured Nanjing in 1853 and made it the capital of their Taiping ("great peace") kingdom. From Nanjing, they campaigned vigorously throughout China, and as they passed through the countryside, whole villages and towns joined them, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes under coercion.
- By 1855, 1 million armed Taipings were poised to attack Beijing, but Qing forces repelled them. The Taipings then turned their attention to the south, and by 1860, firmly entrenched in the Yangtze Valley, they threatened Shanghai. Ultimately, the Qing created regional armies of Chinese soldiers, led by Confucian scholar-bureaucrats and aided by European military advisers, that gradually overcame the Taipings.
- In June 1864, Hong committed suicide, and the Taiping stronghold of Nanjing fell a few months later. Government forces slaughtered 100,000 rebels in the bloody retribution that followed.

The Taiping Rebellion was over, but it had cost somewhere between 20 and 30 million Chinese lives and caused massive declines in agricultural production.

The Self-Strengthening Movement

- Dealing with aggressive foreign powers and surveying lands ravaged by domestic rebellion, the Qing rulers finally realized that reform was necessary if their empire was to survive. Thus, from 1865 to 1895, Qing authorities tried to recreate an efficient and benevolent Confucian government in an attempt to solve their social and economic problems and, at the same time, adopted foreign technology to strengthen state power.
- The most imaginative reform was called the Self-Strengthening Movement. Funded by money from the Qing authorities, local leaders across China were encouraged to raise troops, levy taxes, and establish modern military forces. Movement leaders tried to blend traditional Chinese culture with modern European industrial technology.
- Although the Self-Strengthening Movement ultimately laid the foundations for Chinese industrialization later in the 20th century, it brought only superficial change in the late 19th.
- A key player in the failure of the attempts at reform was the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908). Cixi was a former concubine who became the consort of Emperor Xianfeng. After his death, she manipulated the succession, effectively making herself the true ruler of China during the last 50 years of the Qing dynasty. Cixi was a conservative and bitterly opposed to reform.
- Further evidence of the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement is that foreign powers maintained their firm hold on Chinese affairs. Indeed, the imperial states of Europe effectively dismantled the Qing Empire in the decade between 1885 and 1895.
 - In 1885, France incorporated Vietnam into its colonial Indochinese empire; the following year, Britain incorporated

Burma into its empire; and in 1895, Japan forced China to grant independence to Korea, Taiwan, and parts of Manchuria.

- By 1898, foreign powers had carved the Chinese homeland itself into various spheres of economic interest; it was only mistrust among the foreign governments that prevented the total dismemberment of China!



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Ironically, the funds used by the Empress Dowager Cixi to build the Marble Boat at the Summer Palace were diverted from money set aside to modernize the Chinese Navy.

The Hundred Days of Reform

- These humiliating setbacks sparked one last ambitious but ultimately abortive attempt to save China from further subjugation: the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898.
- Two liberal Chinese scholars—Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao—published treatises reinterpreting Confucianism and justifying radical change in the imperial system. Their intention was to remake China as a powerful, modern industrial state.
- Impressed with their ideas, the young Qing emperor Guangxu launched a sweeping series of reforms to try to transform China into a constitutional monarchy. His agenda included guaranteeing civil liberties, eliminating corruption, remaking the educational system, encouraging foreign influence in China, modernizing the military, and stimulating economic development.
- However, the young emperor's aunt, Empress Dowager Cixi, staged a coup to stop the reforms. She nullified the decrees, imprisoned the

emperor in the Forbidden City, and executed six leading reformers. Cixi then threw her support behind an anti-foreign uprising known as the Boxer Rebellion and even declared war against all foreign powers.

The Boxer Rebellion

- The Boxer Rebellion was headed by militia groups who called themselves the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists. In 1899, the movement went on a rampage to rid China of foreigners, Chinese Christians, and any Chinese who had ties to foreigners.
- In the summer of 1900, 140,000 Boxers besieged foreign embassies in Beijing, but a heavily armed force of British, French, Russian, U.S., German, and Japanese troops quickly crushed the Boxer movement. The Chinese government was then forced to pay a punitive indemnity and allow foreign troops to be permanently stationed in China, not only at embassies but also along all major routes to the sea.
- Because Cixi had supported the Boxers, many Chinese saw their government as morally bankrupt. New revolutionary movements broke out and gained widespread support, including from conservatives.
- Cixi herself died in November 1908, one day after the mysterious death of Emperor Guangxu. Modern tests have revealed that the emperor died of arsenic poisoning. It is intriguing to wonder how the course of modern Chinese and, indeed, world history might have been different had Guangxu been able to carry out his reforms and turn his country into a constitutional monarchy.

The Republic of China

- Just before the deaths of the emperor and his aunt, the Qing court issued the Outline of Constitution, which contained a blueprint for the transformation of China into a constitutional monarchy, complete with a statement on the rights and responsibilities of the people.

- It was all too late, of course. In her last act, Cixi appointed the two-year-old Puyi to the imperial throne, in the hope that he would continue to rule as an old-style emperor.
- But revolution broke out again in the fall of 1911, which resulted in the founding of a new government: the Republic of China. On February 12, 1912, the last Qing emperor, Puyi, abdicated his throne, bringing to an end 4,000 years of dynastic rule in China.
- As we have noted, it was Ming and Qing conservatism that caused China to withdraw from the world at precisely the same moment that Western powers and the Japanese were aggressively engaging in it. The problem facing China and the other East and Southeast Asia nations at the beginning of the 20th century was how to respond to European imperialism.
- Ultimately it would take an industrial revolution in Japan, a communist revolution in China, and two global wars before East Asian states were able to once again gain control of their own destinies!

Suggested Reading

Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*.

Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the British force the Chinese to accept opium as payment for exports, and how did this lead to the loss of Chinese sovereignty under the Qing?
2. Why were attempts at reform late in the Qing dynasty frustrated, bringing to an end 4,000 years of dynastic rule in China?

Korea Choson—Rise of the *Yangban*

Lecture 41

When we last left Korea earlier in the course, it was still under Mongol occupation. But the Koryo king Kongmin (r. 1351–1374) openly opposed the Mongols. When the Ming dynasty was declared in 1368, Kongmin immediately adopted a pro-Ming, anti-Mongol policy. This decision fed into the general chaos that enveloped the final years of Koryo rule, even as the Mongols were being forced out. Two military commanders, Choe Yeong and Yi Song-gye, came to the fore after defeating the Japanese pirates known as the *waegu*. In the aftermath, Yi Song-gye overthrew the last Koryo king and established the Choson dynasty. This dynasty, the subject of this lecture and the next, would rule Korea for more than 500 years.

Emergence of the Choson

- Yi Song-gye borrowed the name Choson (“land of morning calm”) for his new dynasty from the most ancient of all Korean kingdoms. He moved the capital to Hanyang (modern Seoul), where it has been ever since, although since the Second World War, Seoul has been capital of South Korea only.
- The Choson elites adopted Neo-Confucianism as their guiding political doctrine and worked for the next 500 years to create a Neo-Confucian state. Although Yi Song-gye had used military power to stage the coup and seize the throne, it was the support of the Neo-Confucian literati class that validated his reign.
- The literati power brokers worked with Yi Song-gye, ruling as King Taejo, to create a new body of administrative law deeply infused with Confucian ideology, which became the blueprint for the Choson system of government. But strong opposition to the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy persisted in certain elite circles, abating only after Taejo’s fifth son assassinated the main anti-Confucian critic.

- When King Sejong came to power in 1418, he gave even more status to the Confucian scholar class by establishing an elite academy for the Confucian literati known as the Hall of Worthies.
- After Sejong's death in 1450, the kingship was dominated by the literati for five years, until the throne was seized in 1455 by King Sejo, who went on to rule until 1468. Sejo, determined to reduce some of the power of the Hall of Worthies, killed many opponents.
- Sejo then completed work on the statutory administrative code of the Choson government, which culminated in the production of the national code during his reign. This code clearly delineated the structure of Choson government as a sort of constitutional monarchy, in which the governing process was directed by civil and military bureaucrats.

Choson Government

- The elite political and social bureaucratic class in Choson Korea became known as the *yangban*. These were members of the two orders (military and civil) who, in conjunction with the king, now controlled government. The duties of the *yangban* were to devote themselves deeply to the study of Confucianism, to hold themselves accountable to the highest ethical standards of Confucianism, and of course, to hold elite public office.
- As the super-elite of Choson society, the *yangban* married only members of their own class and lived in separate quarters in Seoul and the villages surrounding it. There were even distinctions within the *yangban*, part of a self-selection process designed to prevent the dilution of their privileges and prestige.
- The highest organ of Choson government was the state council, in which three high state councillors made joint decisions. Below this were six ministries that had direct policy access to the king through the royal secretariat. An office of the inspector-general was also

created, to act as a surveillance organ that criticized public policy where necessary and as a watchdog against corruption.

- This system of checks and balances was impressive and complex, but it sometimes worked too well, leading to so much internal oversight and strife between the various organs of government that decision making became stagnant.
- To administer the Choson state, Korea was divided into eight provinces, which were, in turn, subdivided into counties. Each province had its own governor and a magistrate to collect taxes. Each province also had its own six-ministry structure, based on the national model.
- Because this sophisticated system of government was so strongly influenced by the Confucian tradition of Chinese government, it was inevitable that a Confucian exam system would be at the heart of official appointments at all levels in the Choson government. In theory, the exams were open to anyone, but in practice, they were monopolized by the *yangban*.

Structure of Choson Society

- By the late 18th century, the *yangban* had acquired most of the traits of a hereditary nobility, except that their status was based on a mixture of family position, access to the Confucian examination system, and their place in the civil service bureaucracy.
- For most of the 500-year-long Choson period, the *yangban* and the king effectively controlled the central government and military. But this was not a tiny elite minority; estimates are that the *yangban* may have constituted as much as 30 percent of the total Korean population by the year 1800.
- At the opposite end of the social spectrum were slaves and others of “low birth,” who may have constituted 30 to 40 percent of the total population.

- Slavery was hereditary in Choson Korea but was also used as a form of Legalist punishment. Despite their lowly status, successful slaves could, and often did, own property, and successful private slaves could buy their freedom.
- In the 18th century, with the emergence of new merchant and artisan social classes, the tide of opinion gradually turned against the practice of slavery. In 1801, all government slaves were emancipated by decree, and the institution of slavery was completely abolished as part of the Gabo Reforms of 1894.
- Between the *yangban* and the slaves, most of the remaining 30 to 40 percent of the population were farmers. And because Korean agriculture was efficient and productive, most farming was commercial, not just for subsistence. The middle class, largely made up of free farmers, also included merchants, traders, local government or quasi-governmental clerks, craftsmen and laborers, and textile workers.
- The Choson government regarded most land as belonging to the state, as had several Chinese dynasties. Peasant farmers paid land taxes to the government, as well as taxes to their landlords and local taxes on all manufactured products.
- Along with creating a rigidly stratified social structure, the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy of the Choson state also had serious implications for gender relations. To the *yangban*, the law of nature (and their conservative interpretation of Confucian ideology) explicitly sanctioned female subordination and inferiority.
 - Choson Confucianism drew a clear distinction between the public sphere of men and the domestic sphere of women. As a result, women in Choson Korea were considered to be of very low status.
 - According to the policy of *samjong* (“three obediences”), before marriage, a woman was expected to obey her father; during

marriage, a woman must obey her husband; and after the death of her husband, a woman was expected to obey her son.

- According to another policy governing women's behavior, the *chilgo* ("seven injunctions"), a daughter-in-law or wife could be disowned if she demonstrated any of these behaviors: disobedience to her parents-in-law, inability to bear a male son, adultery, jealousy, having an incurable disease, stealing, or talkativeness.
- Despite the rigid gender and social distinctions, the Choson dynasty remained strong, successful, and vigorous throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. During the long reign of King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) in particular, not only was government stable, but extraordinary advances were made in the arts, science, and technology.
- Sejong was also the monarch who promoted and helped create the unique form of writing for the Korean language, the *Hangul* script. Despite its invention in the mid-15th century, the *Hangul* system came into common usage only in the 20th century, as a response to Japanese colonization.

The Decline of the Choson

- After Sejong, the dynasty fell into the hands of weaker kings and entered a period of decline, characterized by violent succession struggles, bitter division among the *yangban* elites, increasing corruption of the civil service exam, crushing tax burdens on farmers, and raids on Korea by the Japanese in 1592 and 1597 and by the Manchus repeatedly between 1627 and 1636.
- Despite this litany of disasters, the most severe problems of the 16th and 17th centuries were actually caused by the confrontation between two different factions of officialdom.
 - The *yangban* split into two factions: the Easterners (or Tongin) and Westerners (or Soin). Violent conflict and purges took

place between the two. Eventually, factional politics became bound up with blood lineage.

- The fact that students were also expected to follow the instructions and factional orientations of their teachers helped further factionalize the elite population. This also ensured the entrenchment of a Confucian-style master-disciple relationship that still resonates in both North and South Korean educational institutions to this day.
- These factional problems led to the emergence of a new intellectual movement in Choson Korea, one that advocated for the practical use of human knowledge. Pioneered by Confucian scholar Yi Su-gwang, the Sirhak (“practical learning”) movement flourished into the late 18th century, supported by discontented scholars, officials, former bureaucrats, and commoners.
 - Sirhak thought advocated a more practical application of the traditional approaches to government and land administration, an increased emphasis on and advocacy for commercial and manufacturing activity, and a renewed interest in Korean history and language.



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Yi Song-gye ruled the Choson dynasty as King Taejo for only six years, but in his short reign, he worked to create a new body of administrative law influenced by Confucian ideology.

- In reality, the interests of the Sirhak scholars were many and varied, but they shared a focus on reality and on the practical application of ideas as a way of solving real-life problems, as opposed to obtuse metaphysical speculations.
- One Sirhak school focused on reforming the institutions of the Choson—land policy, education, government, salaries, military service—until eventually, Sirhak had replaced Neo-Confucianism as the dominant school of political thought.
- As the government became less effective in the 19th century, another Western invention—Catholicism—also began to spread more widely through Choson society.
 - Initially, many *yangban* were attracted to Catholicism, but after a series of government persecutions of Catholics, they mostly turned away. Increasingly, converts came from the peasant and artisan classes, attracted to the equality of Catholicism.
 - It was precisely because of this egalitarian message that a brutal persecution was carried out in 1801, but later, Catholicism was less severely suppressed.
- As we will see in our next lecture, attempts by the government to shut out Catholicism were part of a larger movement within the Choson state to keep Korea isolated from outside influences. And despite Western attempts to interfere, Korea was able to remain dormant and relatively isolated, closing itself to outside contacts in the 19th century until the Japanese turned up early in the 20th.

Suggested Reading

Choi, *A Modern History of Korean Philosophy*.

Jeon, *Science and Technology of Korea*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the Choson dynasty in Korea adopt Confucianism as its principal political ideology?
2. Who were the *yangban*, and how was such a tiny elite majority able to control political, military, and social life in Korea for centuries?

Korea Choson—The Last Dynasty

Lecture 42

Early in the 19th century, Western nations came knocking at the door of the “hermit nation,” determined to establish contact with Korea for trade and other commercial purposes. Of course, the Korean people and the Choson government were only too aware of the fate that had befallen China through the Opium Wars and other clashes with the far more powerful Europeans. In this context, the Choson government decided that its best hope of avoiding a similar fate was essentially to reject all Western overtures for trade and exclude the foreigners. But as the Chinese had experienced, it ultimately proved impossible to keep out the determined and well-armed foreigners.

Conflict with the West and Japan

- Beginning in the 1830s, Korea experienced a series of encounters with British, French, Russian, and American merchant and war ships. In response, the Choson government decided essentially to reject all Western overtures for trade and shut out foreigners.
- In 1866, the Choson government also launched a full-scale campaign against Catholicism. By the time the persecution was over, 9 French missionaries and perhaps 8,000 Koreans had been killed.
- One of the French missionaries who escaped the persecution made his way to China, where he persuaded the commander of the French Asiatic Squadron to take punitive action against the Koreans. A fleet of seven warships entered Korean waters in October 1866. The French clashed with the Koreans, but were ultimately forced to withdraw.
- In 1871, in response to the earlier destruction of an American trading ship, the U.S. Asiatic Squadron was ordered to send a squadron of warships into Korean waters.

- As a result of the French incident five years earlier, the Choson government had worked hard to strengthen Korea's coastal defenses.
- When the U.S. warships tried to steam through the Kanghai Straits, between the island and the mainland, shore batteries opened fire. Shocked, the U.S. fleet decided not to engage and instead withdrew to China.
- The failure of these attacks by two modern military fleets only strengthened Korea's isolationist attitude. The failure of the attacks was undoubtedly due, at least in part, to stubborn Korean resistance, but it was also partly due to the fact that the Western powers were too preoccupied at the time to press their military strength on the Choson.
- The Japanese, however, turned out to be a different matter. Having overthrown the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867, the leaders of Japan decided to adopt an increasingly aggressive attitude toward Korea. By 1873, Japanese leaders were publicly calling for an "expedition" against Korea.

Reversal of Korean Isolationism

- In 1875, the Japanese government provoked a naval "incident" as a pretext for direct intervention, then landed a force of warships on the east coast of Kanghai Island. Choson officials could not resist the heavily armed force and had little option but to sign the Treaty of Kanghai in 1876. This unequal treaty cleared the way for the increasing involvement of Japan in Korean affairs and attempts to limit interference from China.
- The signing of this treaty produced a sea change in the attitude of the Choson government; faced with the probability of ongoing aggressive Japanese intervention, the Choson decided that it was probably in Korea's best interests to actively engage more closely with the rest of the world as a counter to Japanese interference.

- The first result of this foreign policy change occurred in October 1880, when the Choson sought to establish diplomatic relations with the United States. At the same time, the Koreans sent study missions to China and Japan, with the express aim of learning more about modern weapons technology.
- In 1882, the Korean-American Treaty was signed, which the Choson government hoped would discourage both Russian and Japanese aggression against Korea. Indeed, the treaty included a specific clause implying that the United States would come to Korea's aid under a range of circumstances. Similar treaties with other foreign powers quickly followed.
- But these international outreach efforts sparked pushback from the conservative elements of Korean society, who preferred the old hermit nation approach. Some of the conservative Confucian elites demanded the reinstatement of an isolationist government.
- This reinstatement took place after civil and military unrest broke out, but it was short-lived. Both the Chinese and Japanese governments used the Korean about-face as an excuse to intensify their military interference.
 - Japanese forces had been stationed in parts of the peninsula since the signing of the Treaty of Kanghwa in 1876.
 - In 1882, the Qing dynasty in China quickly dispatched its own force of 4,500 men to the peninsula, and by August, the Chinese troops were firmly entrenched in Seoul.
- After something of a standoff, a treaty was signed that temporarily removed both Chinese and Japanese troops from Korea. This allowed the Chinese to remain the major cultural influence on the country for the next decade, from 1885 to 1894.
- While this competition for Korea was being waged by the Japanese and Chinese, the Russians were also becoming increasingly involved in Korean affairs. The Korean king and queen viewed

the involvement of Russia as a third party as an effective means of balancing Chinese and Japanese influence.

- But this pro-Russian attitude immediately provoked suspicion and resentment in China and Japan, particularly after word began to circulate of the signing of a secret treaty between Korea and Russia. As a result, by the late 19th century, the Korean court was deeply split into rival pro-Chinese, pro-Japanese, and pro-Russian factions.
- In 1895, the Japanese ambassador to Korea masterminded nothing less than the brutal assassination of the Choson queen, who had vocally opposed the Japanese-supported politicians in court. The Korean king fled to the Russian legation in Seoul to avoid Japanese plots against him; he publicly rejected Japan and the reform measures being demanded by the pro-Japanese lobby.

Outbreak of War

- These events led to the organization of a massive national campaign, launched by political leaders and intellectuals, to try to gain Korean independence from foreign control. Advocates argued for reform in Korean politics and customs to bring them in line with Western practices.
- At the same time, under the influence of modern education being provided by Protestant mission schools, hundreds of young men held mass meetings in the streets, demanding democratic reforms and an end to Russian and Japanese domination. Conservative (and often pro-Japanese) forces inside Korea responded by jailing reformist leaders.
- In 1894, a major peasant uprising—the Tonghak Rebellion—broke out. The Korean court asked China to send troops to help quell the rebellion. This request, interpreted by the Japanese government as a breach of the recent treaty, gave the Japanese government the pretext it had been waiting for to dispatch troops to Korea. Japan and China were soon at war.

- After six months of continuous Japanese victories, the Qing government was forced to sue for peace, demonstrating not only the total failure of the Qing to modernize its military but also the fact that the balance of power in East Asia had shifted from China to Japan.
- The victorious Japanese now established complete hegemony over Korea via the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed in 1895. The treaty dictated to the Korean government a wide-ranging series of measures to prevent further domestic disturbances.
- Throughout this period, Russian influence was also on the rise in East Asia, and of course, Russian expansion was in direct conflict with the Japanese desire for expansion in the same region. In alliance with France and Germany, Russia forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China. The Russians then promptly leased the territory back from China, a direct provocation to Japan.
- The secret Sino-Russian treaty signed in 1896 served as a defensive pact between China and Russia in case of Japanese aggression. Despite this, tensions between Japan and Russia continued to increase for the next decade, exploding into open conflict during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.

Japanese Occupation

- Contrary to expectations among diplomats and military experts around the world, the Japanese easily defeated the Russians in what has been called “the first great war of the 20th century.”
- In the wake of this conflict, President Theodore Roosevelt quietly acquiesced to Japanese domination in Korea as part of a quid pro quo arrangement for Japan’s recognition of U.S. hegemony in the Philippines.
- The treaty resulting from the Sino-Japanese war acknowledged Japan’s right to take appropriate measures for the “guidance, control, and protection” of Korea. Not content with these arrangements, the

Japanese moved to bring Korea even more firmly under their yoke, dissolving the Korean army, installing a resident Japanese general of Korea, suspending Korean newspapers, and ultimately forcing the emperor to step down. The Chosen dynasty came to end on August 22, 1910.

- Japan officially annexed Korea as a colony and began a 35-year period of harsh colonial rule. During the occupation, the Japanese built up the Korean infrastructure but also attempted to eradicate many elements of Korean culture.

- After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, followed by the beginning of World War II in 1939, Japan further stepped up its efforts to eradicate Korea as a unique cultural entity. The observance of virtually any aspect of Korean culture

became illegal, and perhaps as many as 70,000 Korean cultural and historical artifacts were either destroyed or taken to Tokyo.

- In the last phase of colonial rule, between 1941 and 1945, the Japanese found themselves increasingly distracted by fighting a war on several fronts. To help bolster its ranks, the Japanese imperial army had started accepting Koreans into the armed forces in 1938; after 1943, a general conscription law was introduced that resulted in thousands of Korean men being drafted into military service for the Japanese.



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On August 22, 1910, Emperor Sunjong of Korea was forced to issue a proclamation in which he relinquished both his throne and his country, bringing an end to the Choson dynasty of Korea.

- At the same time, Korean resistance groups were fighting guerrilla warfare with the Japanese, with the assistance of the Chinese Communist Party. The leader of these anti-Japanese guerilla units was none other than Kim Il-Sung, founder of the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea! Tens of thousands of Koreans also joined the People's Liberation Army and fought the Japanese in China.
- The surrender of the Japanese on August 15, 1945, was a day of jubilation throughout Korea. But after 35 years, Japanese imperial rule had transformed the political ideologies and loyalties of the Korean people. As we will see, political tensions in Korea became mixed up with Cold War geopolitics to create the two Koreas—North and South—that continue to play a critical role in the 21st century.

Suggested Reading

Lee, *A New History of Korea*, chapters 8–12.

Palmer, *Korea and Christianity*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did Choson Korea attempt to disengage from the world and return to isolationism?
2. What role did the Japanese play in Korean reengagement with the world?

Medieval Japan—Samurai and Shoguns

Lecture 43

When we were last in Japan, late in the 11th century, we saw that, despite the sophistication of the imperial Heian court, the Japanese countryside was in a state of decline. By the 12th century, the Minamoto clan had claimed the right to rule in the name of the Heian emperor, but they also installed a shogun to take command of the state. The Minamoto established the seat of government at Kamakura and went on to rule Japan for the next four centuries. Thus began the so-called medieval period of Japan's history, which we will explore in this lecture by considering two distinct shogunate eras: the Kamakura and Muromachi shogunates (1185–1465) and the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868).

The Kamakura Shogunate

- In 1185, the powerful leader of the Minamoto clan (which instituted the Kamakura shogunate), Yoritomo, forced the emperor to grant him the title of shogun and became supreme military and political commander of Japan.
- Although many historians are uncomfortable applying the term “feudal” to Japanese history, the Kamakura shogunate did introduce a quasi-feudal system. That is, both the Kamakura and subsequent Muromachi shogunates were characterized by a decentralized political and economic system in which provincial lords exercised great power in local regions. It was in this context that the mounted warrior known as the samurai began to play a distinctive and major role in Japanese life.
 - The origins of the samurai can be traced back to reforms introduced in the 8th century, whereby one in every three or four males was drafted into the military, part of an attempt by the imperial government to establish a Chinese-style professional military.

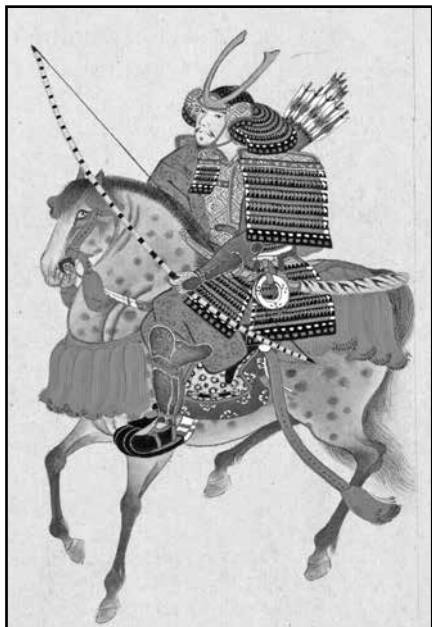
- These soldiers were expected to provide their own weapons and, in return, were exempted from taxes.
- As part of the same reforms, 12 new classes of bureaucrats were established; those of the sixth class and below were called samurai, which comes from a Chinese word meaning “those who serve the nobility.”
- Over the centuries that followed, the term “samurai” was gradually applied to military men, particularly to those warriors who became associated with the powerful clans.
- After the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate, the samurai were given increasing responsibilities by the shogun, until they effectively became the ruling class of medieval Japan.

The Way of the Warrior

- During the Kamakura shogunate, the more refined forms of behavior associated with the samurai in Western consciousness began to appear, in a way not unlike the evolution of chivalry among European knights.
 - It was during a period of violent disturbances in medieval Europe that the Christian church began to form a closer relationship with secular royalty and nobility for protection. This relationship improved the behavior of the nobility and their knights in that it added Christian values to the knightly code of chivalry.
 - The samurai began without any code of chivalry, but this changed and evolved until these warriors attained the level of the military and ethical behavior also being championed by European knights.
 - Undoubtedly, the samurai were professional warriors, skilled in the martial arts and in the use of the bow and arrow and the sword. But they also subscribed to the philosophy of Bushido—the “Way of the Warrior”—not only because it

emphasized superb military skills, but because it was seen as a way of attaining great honor.

- Bushido demanded that the samurai demonstrate an extraordinary degree of loyalty to one another, to their local overlord (*daimyo*), and, ultimately, to the powerless but nonetheless still-respected emperor.
- Interestingly, we know of many samurai women, who were expected to endure the same Spartan hardships as their male consorts and to fight to the death with their husbands. In fact, Japanese elite woman had a long history of learning martial arts and participating in battles well before the Kamakura shogunate.
- The popular image of the samurai suggests that they had no fear of death; they would enter any battle, no matter the odds, because to die in battle would bring honor to one's family and one's lord. However, we know of some cowardly, disloyal, and treacherous samurai who fell far short of the idealized image.
- Although the samurai were skilled in battle formations and combined assaults, they also sought the opportunity to fight alone,



Some historians argue that the early samurai were more like mercenaries and robbers than the elite warriors they became under the Kamakura shogunate.

one on one, rather than as part of a contingent. When a samurai killed his opponent, he often severed the head, which he took back to his base after battle as proof of his victory.

- The only option open to a defeated samurai was death on the battlefield or by a form of ritual suicide called *seppuku* (“stomach cutting”), or disembowelment. This form of suicide was performed under various circumstances: to avoid the dishonor of surrender or capture in battle and to atone for a misdeed or unworthy act.

Mongol Invasions and Civil War

- In 1274 and again in 1281, the Kamakura shogunate and its samurai successfully defended Japan from the Mongols, although the shogunate was weakened in the process. Both invasions failed as much because of the efforts of Mother Nature as the military prowess of the defenders. The sword-wielding samurai were really no match for the invaders, who were armed with superior fighting technology and tactics.
- Despite their fear of the sea, the Mongols landed on the shores of Kyushu after occupying Tsushima and other nearby islands, but gathering typhoon storms called *kamikaze* (“divine winds”) forced the Mongols to leave. As we know, the term *kamikaze* was revived nearly 700 years later by suicide-mission fighter pilots in the last stages of World War II.
- The decades following the attempted Mongol invasions saw intermittent civil war in Japan as factions fought the new Muromachi shogunate government, which had replaced the weakened Kamakura shogun, ostensibly on behalf of the emperor. This increasing fragmentation led in 1467 to full-scale civil war, which lasted more or less for the next century.
- Despite the bitter conflict, the Japanese economy grew quickly after Portuguese missionaries and merchants, followed by other European traders, started arriving in the early 16th century. Thereafter, increasing numbers of European missionaries began

to arrive, and by 1600, Japan was known by, and open to, the outside world. That openness ended, however, with the advent of the Tokugawa shogunate, which became determined to return Japan to isolation.

The Tokugawa Shogunate

- Late in the 16th century, a series of leaders in Japan attempted to bring an end to Japan's own "Warring States" era. In 1600, one of these leaders, Tokugawa Ieyasu, established a military government known as the Tokugawa *bakufu* ("tent government"). This temporary government ended up ruling Japan for more than 250 years.
- The principal aim of the Tokugawa was to prevent a return to civil war, which meant curtailing the power of the powerful territorial lords, the *daimyo*. The shoguns also attempted to tightly control relations between Japan and the outside world.
- Once the *daimyo* were under control, political stability returned to Japan, which allowed the Tokugawa to focus on economic growth. Production of rice, cotton, and silk began to increase, and many villages were able to move away from subsistence to market farming for the first time in Japan's history.
- Increased food production led, in turn, to population growth; demographers estimate that during the 17th century, the population of Japan rose to 29 million. But the fear of overstraining resources caused many families to limit population growth, mostly through the practice of infanticide.

Tokugawa Society and Culture

- These economic and demographic developments allowed the Tokugawa to preside over a period of marked social change in Japan. Many of the elites fell into financial difficulty, while merchants became increasingly wealthy and powerful.

- Despite this, Confucianism and Chinese language and culture remained the dominant focus of elite culture throughout the Tokugawa shogunate. At the same time, however, some scholars tried to establish a more distinctive Japanese voice and style in their work. During the 18th century, the “native learning” school publicly scorned both Neo-Confucianism and even Buddhism as alien cultural imports, emphasizing Japanese folk traditions and Shintoism instead. A strong element of nationalism and even xenophobia marked this movement.
- The emergence of a prosperous merchant class led to the development of a vibrant urban culture. In such cities as Kyoto, Edo, and Osaka, Japanese entertainers catered to a sophisticated middle class. At the heart of Tokugawa urban culture were the floating palaces—vast entertainment and pleasure emporiums that contained teahouses, brothels, and public baths. New developments also arose in fiction and theater, including Kabuki and Bunraku.
- From the mid-16th century on, Jesuit missionaries became increasingly vigorous in their conversion efforts in Japan, and by 1615, there were an estimated 300,000 Christians in Japan. But because several *daimyo* had been converted, the Tokugawa sought to restrict Jesuit activities for fear they might allow the *daimyo* to rebuild their former lucrative relationships with European merchants. In a series of violent crackdowns, European Christians were tortured and executed by the government.

Turmoil in the 19th Century

- By the early 19th century, Japanese society was in turmoil. A series of agricultural crises occurred, and harsh taxation led to a general economic crisis and starvation among rural people. Impoverished migrants flocked to the cities, and as the price of food rose, the urban poor also experienced extreme poverty. Even the samurai and *daimyo* faced hardship as they fell into debt to the expanding merchant class.

- The Tokugawa government responded by passing a series of conservative reforms between 1841 and 1843, which included canceling samurai debt and forcing peasants back to the land to grow rice, but the reforms failed.
- Like its East Asian neighbors in the mid-19th century, Japan also came under foreign pressure, particularly from the United States, which was seeking ports for its Pacific merchant and whaling fleets.
- When Japan refused these requests, in 1853 and again in 1854, a U.S. naval squadron under Commodore Matthew Perry trained its guns on the Tokugawa capital and demanded that the shogun sign a treaty with the United States and open Japanese ports to commercial relations. The shogun had no alternative but to agree, and Japan was forced to sign the first of a series of unequal treaties.
- Both the emperor and the *daimyo* bitterly resented the fact that the shogun had signed the treaties. Domestic opposition to the Tokugawa grew rapidly, particularly among the samurai. The Tokugawa responded by imprisoning their samurai critics, but in a brief civil war, opposition armies trained by foreign experts and armed with Western weapons put so much pressure on the Tokugawa that the shogun resigned.
- In January 1868, the young emperor Meiji took power, and as we will see in the next lecture, he went on to rule successfully until 1912.

Suggested Reading

Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*.

Shirokauer et al., *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, chapters 11–13.

Varley, *Imperial Restoration in Medieval Japan*.

Questions to Consider

1. How useful and accurate is the word “feudalism” in describing the political and social organization of Japan during its “medieval period”?
2. What does the famous novel *The Life of a Man Who Lived for Love* tell us about the sophisticated urban lifestyle followed by many Japanese during the Tokugawa period?

Tokugawa and Meiji Japan

Lecture 44

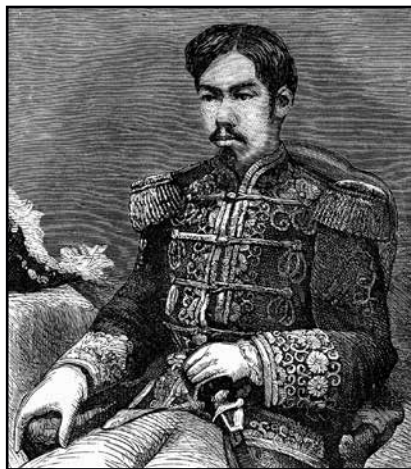
In the last lecture, we saw that by forcing the Tokugawa shogun to sign an unequal treaty in 1854, the United States provoked a political crisis in Japan. Ultimately, the shogun was forced to resign, and in January 1868, the young emperor Meiji took power, ushering in an era of Japanese history known as the Meiji Restoration. As we will see, the Meiji era led to the complete political, economic, and social reorganization of Japan and was responsible for its dramatic transformation into a modern global military and industrial power. We will look at three aspects of this era: the Meiji Restoration itself, the period of imperialism in Japan, and Japan's role in World War II.

The Meiji Restoration

- The Meiji Restoration brought an end to a series of military governments that had dominated Japan since the Kamakura shogun first claimed power in 1185. Determined to gain equality with foreign powers, a conservative coalition of *daimyo*, nobles, and samurai sought to study and copy the industrial policies of the West.
- In a later stage of modernization, the Meiji government eliminated the old feudal order by removing the *daimyo* from power and abolishing the samurai. In 1889, a new constitution was proclaimed, establishing a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature (the Diet).
- This rapid reorganization of the political structure demonstrates just how determined the Meiji were to cast off the traditional trappings of Chinese-style dynastic government and the semi-feudal structure that had dominated Japan's long middle ages.
- According to the new Western-style constitution proclaimed by the Meiji, the emperor, powerless for centuries, now commanded the

armed forces, named the prime minister, appointed the cabinet, and had the right to dissolve the Diet.

- The Meiji then created a modern transport, communication, and educational infrastructure along Western lines and removed all barriers to internal trade. Universities were created to provide advanced technical education. Most enterprises were private, but the government controlled all military industries and did all it could to stimulate industrial development.



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After the resignation of the Tokugawa shogun, the new emperor took the name Meiji, meaning “enlightened rule.”

- In the 1880s, the government sold most of the remaining industries under its control to private investors and corporations. This move concentrated economic power in the hands of a small group of powerful capitalist enterprises known as the *zaibatsu*, which literally translates as “wealthy clique.”
- *Zaibatsu* were the equivalent of cartels or trusts and were usually organized around a single family or clan. The four primary *zaibatsu* during this period were Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, and Yasuda.
- During the first half of the 20th century, the *zaibatsu* grew massively large and wealthy, but they were dissolved by the Allied powers after World War II. In the 1950s, new enterprise groups emerged, many created by companies that had formerly been part of the big four *zaibatsu*.

- By the early 20th century, Japan had joined the ranks of the major industrial powers, but this rapid economic development came at a brutal cost for the peasants, who produced 90 percent of all government revenues during the reform stage and, thus, suffered from an appalling tax burden. Peasant uprisings broke out in 1883 and 1884 and were ruthlessly crushed, as was a growing labor union movement in 1901.
- Still, these radical and painful reforms worked; by 1902, Meiji Japan was strong enough to sign an alliance of equal power with Britain.

Military Ascendancy

- As we have seen, Japan displayed its newfound military prowess with rapid victories over China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. These victories were mostly the result of Japan's ability to gain access to modern military technology.
 - When an anti-foreign rebellion broke out in Korea in 1893, the Qing sent a Chinese army to restore order. Because the Meiji government was unwilling to recognize Chinese control over a land so close to Japan, it declared war on China in August 1894 and forced Qing armies out of Korea.
 - The easy Japanese victory startled other foreign powers, especially Russia, which also had ambitions for expansion in East Asia. In 1904, war broke out between Japan and Russia, and the following year, the Japanese navy destroyed the Russian Baltic Fleet. Clearly, Japan had transformed itself into one of the major military and industrial powers of the globe.
- When the First World War broke out in 1914, Japan entered the war on the side of the Allies. It quickly demanded that Germany hand over its leased territories in China to Japan without compensation and that all German warships withdraw from Chinese waters. The Japanese then took control of numerous German possessions in East Asia and the Pacific.

- With the Allies preoccupied by the fighting in Europe, the Japanese also took the opportunity to present a charter of 21 secret demands to the new republican government in China. The Chinese had little option but to accede to some of these demands, and only British support for the Chinese government prevented total capitulation.
- By the end of the Great War in 1918, the Japanese were poised to become not just a leading economic and military force but also a major imperial power.

The Great Depression in Japan

- Throughout the 1920s, Japan's economy surged, but this moment of prosperity was short-lived. Japan, like much of the developed world, suffered badly during the Great Depression.
- The Japanese economy was by now greatly dependent on U.S. markets to sell its manufactured goods, and as demand in the United States fell sharply, unemployment skyrocketed in all export sectors in Japan. By the early 1930s, a frustrated public blamed the government for continuing economic problems.
- Right-wing groups called for an end to party rule, and xenophobic nationalists demanded the preservation of unique Japanese cultural elements and the eradication of all Western influences.

Japanese Imperialism

- Those politicians who supported Japan's continuing role in the international industrial-capitalist system faced increasing opposition from those who favored a militaristic vision of Japan as the dominant imperial power of East Asia.
 - The militarist faction set its sights on China, arguing that political instability there made that vast country an inviting target for Japanese expansion.
 - The nationalists focused particularly on Manchuria, arguing that Japan needed to protect its considerable interests there from the Chinese.

- On the night of September 18, 1931, Japan's military used a staged pretext to launch a military invasion of the region. By 1932, Japanese troops were in control of all of Manchuria.
- In response to the invasion, the leader of the Chinese Guomindang, Chiang Kai-shek, appealed to the League of Nations for assistance to help stop Japanese aggression. The League eventually called for the removal of troops, but the Japanese responded by leaving the League.
- The Japanese military embarked on a series of conquests in East Asia, determined to create an empire. In doing so, they helped spark World War II.

Lead-Up to Global War

- The world's second global conflict really began, not with the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, but some eight years earlier, with Japan's attacks on China in the 1930s. The Japanese conquest of Manchuria between 1931 and 1932 was the first step in a revisionist process of aggressive expansionism that more accurately marks the beginning of the Second World War.
- By the early 1930s, it was clear to the world that civilian politicians in Japan had lost control of the government and that militarists and imperialists were now in charge. Following Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, it had no impediment to a continuation of its ultranationalist and pro-military expansionist policy.
- The Japanese government launched a full-scale invasion of China in 1937. After the Battle of Marco Polo Bridge, Japanese troops quickly took control of Beijing and then moved south toward Shanghai and the Nationalist capital of Nanjing. By December 1937, Nanjing and Shanghai had both fallen, and for the next six months, the Japanese forces won repeated victories.
- China became the first nation to experience the horrors of World War II: Chinese civilians suffered death and destruction on a

massive scale; tens of thousands of citizens in Shanghai alone died from Japanese bombing of the city.

- In September 1937, the formerly bitterly opposed Chinese Nationalists and Communists agreed to work together, uniting into an army of 1.7 million men and women. Although the Chinese never defeated the Japanese, by 1941, they had tied up half the Japanese army.
- Meanwhile, the Japanese government allied itself with other aggressive states, forming the Axis alliance. In September 1940, the Japanese signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. They then cleared the way for further empire building in Asia and the Pacific by signing a pact with the Soviet Union in April 1941.
- As Japanese forces continued their conquests in East Asia, the U.S. government responded by freezing Japanese assets. But the Japanese ignored U.S. demands to withdraw from China and Southeast Asia and became even more intractable after October 1941, when Tojo Hideki became prime minister. The new Japanese government immediately drew up plans for war against Britain and the United States.
- The Japanese hoped to destroy American naval power in the Pacific in a single blow with an attack on Pearl Harbor, but instead, their attack gave the United States the pretext it had been waiting for to declare war on Japan, Germany, and Italy.
- Despite this, the Japanese went from victory to victory, quickly capturing Borneo, Burma, and the Dutch Indies and threatening Australia. The turning point in the Pacific war finally came with the Battle of Midway, fought on June 4, 1942. The Allies took the offensive, hopping from island to island until the United States gradually retook the Philippines and islands close to Japan, such as Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

- The fall of Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and the Saipan islands brought the Japanese homeland within easy reach of U.S. bombers, and in August of 1945, the U.S. government, in an attempt to bring the war to a rapid end, used its revolutionary new weapon—the atomic bomb—against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at an immediate cost of 200,000 lives.
- Japan surrendered on August 15, utterly humiliated. Ultimately, the role of the United States in Japanese postwar recovery would prove to be decisive, ensuring not only a rapid recovery but also the creation of a stable Western-style democracy based on a robust export economy. This facilitated Japan's complete rehabilitation and reacceptance into the ranks of major nations, where it has remained as a partner of stability and moderation ever since.

Suggested Reading

Totman, *Early Modern Japan*.

Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan*.

Young, *Japan's Total Empire*.

Questions to Consider

1. How was Japan able to transform itself into a modern global power under the Meiji government?
2. What was the impact on Eastern civilization of Japanese aggression during the Second World War?

The People's Republic of China

Lecture 45

To this point in our course, we have explored the history of the East Asian region by considering a number of foundational themes: ideas about effective forms of government and economic structures; the critical roles of Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia; and ideas about society and the roles of particular social groups. With this lecture, we will return to these enduring themes and consider the most recent developments in the political, economic, social, and cultural history of the major Eastern nations. We begin by returning to China; when we last left this nation, poor government and Western imperial aggression had led to a loss of sovereignty and the virtual dismantling of the Chinese state by the early 20th century.

Political Upheaval in China

- During the first four decades of the 20th century, China was in a state of almost continuous political upheaval. With the abdication of the child emperor Puyi in 1912, China's dynastic era came to an abrupt end more than 4,000 years after it had begun.
- One year after Puyi's abdication, a leading opponent of the old Qing regime, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, proclaimed the establishment of a Chinese republic. He described his revolutionary manifesto as the Three People's Principles: nationalism, democracy, and the livelihood of the people.
- On October 10, 1911, while Sun was in Colorado raising funds for his Revive China Society, his colleagues, along with soldiers loyal to the movement, rebelled against the Chinese government and captured the city of Hankou. Almost immediately, several Chinese provinces declared their independence from Beijing and the Qing dynasty.

The Chinese Republic

- With the dissolution of central government, the Chinese republic was soon plunged into a state of political and economic anarchy marked by a return of the rule of warlords. No stable government was created, nor did any semblance of political order appear. Foreign imperial powers took advantage of Chinese instability by establishing new “spheres of interest” along the coast of the China Sea.
- This continuing foreign interference fostered a strong nationalist sentiment throughout China. Intellectuals wanted a new democratic form of government, but they also wanted to revive Chinese culture.
- Intellectuals and students looked forward optimistically to the 1919 Peace Conference in Paris as the start of a new era for China, hoping for the termination of the treaty system and the restoration of Chinese sovereignty. But those hopes were shattered when Japan was given approval for increasing interference in Chinese affairs.
- The so-called May Fourth Movement quickly erupted all over China, as citizens protested Japanese interference. Despite these protests, the Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919, explicitly sanctioned Japanese control over all its Chinese territories. In response, the May Fourth Movement’s leaders pledged to rid China of imperialism and began to seek out radical ideologies that might help them to do so, including communism.

The Chinese Communist Party

- Inspired by the success of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, by 1921, the Chinese Communist Party had been proclaimed in Shanghai, organized along Soviet lines. Among its early members was Mao Zedong, a young man destined to become one of the iconic figures of the 20th century.

- The Communists argued that a Marxist-inspired revolution was the only cure for China's problems. They also questioned many of the foundational social elements of Eastern civilization, championing equality for women, for example, and opposing arranged marriages and foot-binding.
- Sun Yat-sen did not share the Communists' enthusiasm for Marxist ideology. Instead, he promoted his own platform for modernization that included elimination of special privileges for foreigners, national reunification, rapid economic development, and the establishment of a democratic republican government based on universal suffrage. Sun also realized the importance of having a strong military to support his movement; thus, he established a military academy to train troops and appointed Chiang Kai-shek as its head.
- Sun was determined to bring the country under the control of his Nationalist Party (the Guomindang), but this was made more difficult after it was infiltrated by members of the Chinese Communist Party. Advisers from the Soviet Union helped reorganize both parties, hedging their bets in an attempt to ensure that Soviet influence would be strong in China, whoever won the political struggle!

Nationalist Rise to Power

- After the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, leadership of the Guomindang fell to General Chiang Kai-shek. He quickly launched a major offensive known as the Northern Expedition that attempted to defeat the warlords and bring China under Guomindang control.
- Initially, Chiang left the Communists alone, but in 1927, he unexpectedly turned against them, brutally suppressing Shanghai's Communist-led labor movement and bringing to a bloody end a period of cautious cooperation between the two parties. The Communists retreated to an isolated region of southeast China, where they tried to reconstitute their forces.

- In 1928, with both the warlords and Communists weakened, Nationalist forces occupied Beijing, established a central government in Nanjing, and declared the Guomindang to be the official government of a unified China. Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists ruled China for the next nine years, from 1928 to 1937, as a one-party dictatorship that they claimed was readying the country for democracy.
- Despite some limited success on the international front, the Nationalists never gained the support of the Chinese peasants, who looked to the Communists for relief.
- In September 1931, the Japanese used a pretext of Chinese sabotage of the Manchurian railway to invade parts of northern China, where they declared a puppet government. The Communists, meanwhile, tried to rebuild their strength, despite repeated military campaigns sent against them by Chiang Kai-shek. In October 1934, the Communist Red Army was defeated in Jiangxi province.

The Long March

- Mao Zedong and the remnants of the Red Army managed to escape a Nationalist blockade and begin a strategic retreat, known as the Long March. As the march continued, Mao broke from his colleagues, who favored a more traditional approach to military strategy, and advocated for the adoption of guerilla tactics.
- By the time the Communists had reached Guizhou province, Mao was widely recognized as the leader of the movement. The marchers continued toward Shaanxi province by a harrowing and dangerous route. Some 86,000 Red Army members had begun the march, but only 8,000 survived the journey to Shaanxi, where the new Communist headquarters was established.
- As a result of the Long March, Mao Zedong was now the undisputed leader and principal theoretician of the party, with Zhou Enlai as his loyal deputy, a situation that changed little over the next 40 years.

- Mao articulated the Chinese version of Marxism (soon called Maoism), which argued that oppressed peasants, rather than the urban proletariat, were the true foundations of a successful Communist revolution. China was on the brink of an unknown future, but with the Second World War about to intervene, it would be another 14 years before that future would be determined.

Japanese Invasion and Aftermath

- The Chinese mounted staunch resistance to the Japanese invasion of China. By September 1937, the Nationalists and Communists had agreed to work together against the Japanese. Although the Japanese had naval and air superiority, by 1941, the ragtag Chinese forces had managed to tie down half the Japanese army.
- The tenuous coalition of Nationalists and Communists threatened to tear apart many times throughout the war, and there were numerous military clashes between the two. But the Communists' guerilla tactics against the Japanese captured the loyalty of millions of Chinese peasants. By the end of the war, the Communists were poised to take control.
- With the defeat of Japan in 1945, civil war in China immediately resumed. In 1948, the momentum swung to the Communists after the People's Liberation Army inflicted heavy defeats on the Nationalists.
- Chiang Kai-shek and about 2 million Nationalists fled the mainland to the island of Taiwan, where they proclaimed themselves China's legitimate government. Meanwhile, on the mainland, Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

Mao's Leadership

- Mao Zedong set out to reorganize China by imitating the organizational structure of the Soviet Union. A new constitution was declared in 1954, which stipulated a national assembly chosen by popular election. But in reality, political power was monopolized by the central committee and politburo chaired by Mao.

- To protect its authority, the party orchestrated campaigns to remove from power individuals likely to be a threat, particularly those affiliated with the old Nationalist government. In 1951 alone, tens of thousands were executed and many more sent to labor camps.
- The economy of China was utterly transformed when land ownership was declared collective and rapid industrialization was instituted. Radical social reforms also quickly eliminated many Chinese traditions that had been in place for centuries.
- Moscow and Beijing worked closely during the early years of the Cold War; both saw the United States as their common enemy. But cracks soon appeared in this relationship, and Mao embarked on a series of programs to distinguish Chinese from Soviet communism.



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From the 1920s until his death, Mao Zedong was the global epitome of a great revolutionary leader, a larger-than-life character in the vein of the charismatic and autocratic emperors of Chinese history.

- The Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) was an attempt to have the Chinese economy match that of more developed nations by collectivizing all agriculture and industry. But the abolition of private ownership had a disastrous impact on agricultural production, and a deadly famine ensued.
- After this disaster, Mao tried in 1966 to reignite the revolutionary spirit of China with a Cultural Revolution, designed to root

out revisionists. Millions of people—particularly teachers, professionals, managers, and intellectuals—were singled out by the Red Guard for humiliation, persecution, and death.

- During the early 1970s, political struggles within the party gradually undermined Mao's power. When he died in September 1976, four of the most influential supporters of the Cultural Revolution—the so-called Gang of Four—staged a coup and tried to seize control of the party, but the gang was arrested and the Cultural Revolution was finally over.
- The Chinese people have been able to reconcile the complex personality of Mao Zedong by treating him as a split personality: a “good Mao” and a “bad Mao.” In a later lecture, we will see how the next generation of Chinese leaders would deal with Mao's cultural, political, and economic legacy.

Suggested Reading

Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism*.

Salisbury, *The Long March*.

Sheridan, *The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912–1949*.

Snow, *Red Star over China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the Communists succeed and the Nationalists fail in the chaotic race for control of China during the first half of the 20th century? How significant was the role of Mao Zedong?
2. What impact did the Cultural Revolution have on many of the foundational elements of Chinese civilization?

Isolation and Cold War Conflicts

Lecture 46

As we have seen throughout this course, for thousands of years, Eastern civilization had evolved in relative geographical and geopolitical isolation from the rest of the world. But from the 18th century on, it had become impossible to ignore the involvement of a host of foreign players in East Asian affairs, and this forced interconnectedness of the world increased exponentially during the Cold War. Thus, in this lecture, we will take a closer look at the impact of the Cold War and the general trend toward globalization on Eastern civilization during the 20th century.

China and the Soviet Union

- Throughout most of the 1950s, China was happy to recognize the Soviet Union as the undisputed authority in world communism, and China received Soviet weapons and economic aid in return. For their part, the Soviets worked diligently in the UN to have the Chinese seat in the Security Council transferred from the Nationalists in Taiwan to the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing.
- But cracks started to appear in the partnership late in the decade when China realized it was receiving less aid from the Soviets than noncommunist Egypt and India were. It was also in the 1950s that tensions between China and India broke out over the question of the sovereignty of Tibet. The Soviets infuriated the Chinese by outwardly remaining neutral in the conflict yet secretly giving a huge loan to India.
- By the early 1960s, occasional border clashes occurred between Soviet and Chinese troops in Central Asia. China's successful nuclear weapons test in 1964 escalated the tensions.
- This deteriorating relationship between two major nations was played out in the even larger context of the Cold War, which became

a truly global phenomenon in the 1950s. In military terms, the Cold War passed through several distinct phases.

- In the late 1940s and 1950s, when the United States held a distinct advantage in weaponry, the Soviets or Chinese could not risk a major clash.
- When U.S. allies Britain (in 1952) and France (in 1960) also developed nuclear capacity, NATO published its doctrine of “overwhelming retaliation,” a further disincentive to the outbreak of any major military conflict.
- But the Cold War became hot twice, and in both cases, these wars were fought in East Asia: in Korea between 1950 and 1953 and in Indochina, where defeated French troops gave way to Americans in 1954, dragging the United States into the Vietnam War, which lasted until 1975.

The Division of North and South Korea

- As we have seen throughout this course, Korea has a long history of division between north and south, and the roots of this division had remained deep, even during periods of Japanese occupation.
- Korea was liberated from Japanese hegemony on August 15, 1945, but after three and a half decades of Japanese colonial rule, Korean society was a chaotic mix of old and new classes, ideologies, and political factions.
 - On the left of the political spectrum now were thousands of dedicated communists, many of whom had waged guerilla warfare against the Japanese for years and were determined to transform Korea into a more egalitarian society.
 - On the right were landlords, businessmen, and former Japanese collaborators who were determined to preserve their privileged place in society.
- Following the defeat of the Japanese, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to a proposal to jointly occupy the Korean

peninsula as a trusteeship, with an agreed-upon division between the two along the 38th parallel. Originally, the arrangement was to be temporary.

- In February 1946, a provisional government was established north of the parallel by communist leader and anti-Japanese guerilla hero Kim Il-Sung. This government was known as the North Korean People's Provisional Committee.
- As mistrust grew between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States sought UN involvement in the question of Korea's future, but the Soviets boycotted the discussions.
- With dwindling hopes for reunification, the Republic of Korea was declared in the south on August 15, 1948. And on September 9, 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was declared in the north, with Kim Il-Sung as its first prime minister.
- Almost immediately, the relationship between the two Koreas degenerated into a series of bloody skirmishes along the 38th parallel, escalating into full-scale war in 1950.

The Korean War

- On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces, equipped with Soviet weapons, suddenly invaded the South. They took Seoul in three days, and by early August, virtually all of the peninsula was under their control.
- The United States (under UN auspices) quickly came to the aid of the South Koreans, and General MacArthur succeeded in splitting the North Korean army in two with a successful amphibious assault on the port of Inchon, near Seoul. A rapid U.S./UN counteroffensive then recaptured Seoul and forced the North Koreans back past the 38th parallel.
- At that moment, the Chinese Red Army came to the aid of the communist North. Chinese troops drove the UN forces back past the

38th parallel; on January 4, 1951, Seoul fell for a second time. UN forces managed to recapture the city in March 1952, but thereafter, a stalemate developed between the two sides.

- The real potential that this conflict could escalate into nuclear war finally ended with an armistice that restored the border between the Koreas near the 38th parallel and created the Demilitarized Zone, a 2.5-mile-wide buffer zone between the two Koreas that is still in place today.

The Vietnam War

- Vietnam also has a long history of division between north and south, based on geography, cultural and linguistic differences, and its long and complex relationship with the Chinese and French.
- During the 18th and 19th centuries, the French had assembled a colonial empire in Indochina that included Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.
 - Much of Indochina was then occupied by the Japanese in the Second World War, with a puppet Vichy-style French colonial administration left in charge.
 - Late in the war, Japan replaced this French regime with a pro-Japanese Vietnamese emperor named Bao Dai, who immediately proclaimed independence from France.
- During the war, as was the case in Japanese-occupied China and Korea, a communist guerilla force, the Viet Minh, formed the most effective anti-Japanese resistance movement. The Viet Minh were particularly strong in the north, close to their bases just across the border in China.
- When Japan surrendered, the leader of the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh, moved quickly to fill the power vacuum and proclaimed an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The French reoccupied the major cities with the indirect assistance of British forces.



The U.S. government believed that war was necessary to prevent the communist takeover of South Vietnam, while the North Vietnamese government saw U.S. involvement as an extension of the colonial war it had just successfully waged against France.

- The first direct confrontation occurred at Haiphong harbor in November 1946, when the Viet Minh fired on a French warship. In the brutal retaliation that followed, 6,000 Vietnamese were killed, leading to the outbreak of a guerilla war against the French.
- The initial phase of the war, from 1947 to 1949, resulted in a stalemate. But with the success of the Communist revolution in China in 1949, the Viet Minh gained a powerful ally and, with Chinese military assistance, drove the French out of North Vietnam the following year.
- From 1952 onward, the United States agreed to cover the cost of the colonial war for the French. The 1954 Geneva Accords that followed the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu partitioned Vietnam into two zones, with the hope that this would be a temporary measure until national elections could reunite the two halves. The

north was now ruled by the Viet Minh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the south was known as the State of Vietnam.

- The U.S. government saw the situation in Vietnam as a test case for the containment of communism. U.S. military advisers started arriving in Vietnam in the 1950s, troop levels tripled in 1961 and 1962, and combat units were deployed beginning in 1965. U.S. military involvement peaked in January 1968 at the time of the Tet Offensive.
- With support for the war eroding and bitter divisions in the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, U.S. ground forces were gradually withdrawn. But despite the Paris Peace Accords signed by all parties in January 1973, fighting continued for two more years. In April 1975, the North Vietnamese captured Saigon just as the last U.S. personnel were withdrawn, an event that marked the real end of the Vietnam War.
- North and South Vietnam were reunified the following year and, unlike Korea, have stayed united up to the present day, under the control of a communist government in Hanoi.

Diplomatic Rapprochement

- As both the Vietnam War and the Cold War dragged on, the U.S. government decided it was time to try something new to take advantage of the tense split between the Soviets and Chinese.
- In 1972, President Richard Nixon visited the aging Chairman Mao Zedong in China, a diplomatic coup that had the immediate effect of bringing China back into what had been an essentially bipolar world. Nixon's visit was followed by several trips by Henry Kissinger. It wasn't long before liaison offices opened in Beijing and Washington DC, and formal diplomatic relations were inaugurated in 1979.
- As a direct result of the establishment of this relationship between China and the world, the Soviets felt under increasing pressure

to stabilize their European flank. This led quickly to a major breakthrough in the lessening of Cold War tensions: the Helsinki Conference, which ran from 1972 to 1975.

- With Nixon's visit to China and the end of the Vietnam War, the Cold War had entered a new phase that saw China reassume an important geopolitical position. But even with these diplomatic breakthroughs, China was still mired in the Cultural Revolution and trying to deal with a failing economy. In the next lecture, we'll see how China's economy revived under Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping.

Suggested Reading

Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*.

Meisner, *Mao's China and After*.

Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the globalization of the Cold War affect the relationship between the Soviet Union and China, resulting in the emergence of different ideological visions in each country?
2. Why were the only "hot wars" during the entire Cold War period both fought in East Asia?

The Rise of the East Asian Tigers

Lecture 47

In 1981, five years after the death of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping assumed complete control of both the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China. Deng immediately moderated Mao's commitment to economic self-sufficiency and brought China into the international trading and financial system. This decision to pursue a quasi-capitalist model would undoubtedly have surprised the sociologist Max Weber, who had argued that Confucianism and Daoism were essentially incompatible with capitalism. As we will see, this tension between the necessity of adopting imported models to ensure modernization and economic success while retaining ancient ideals that had long sustained Eastern civilization has been played out repeatedly in all the nations of East Asia in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Four Modernizations

- Deng Xiaoping's program of introducing the principles of market capitalism to China was dubbed the Four Modernizations. Essentially, this meant that China needed to make significant progress in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense.
- To facilitate his program, and realizing how desperately China needed to educate its managerial class after the anti-education policies of the Cultural Revolution, Deng sent tens of thousands of Chinese students to foreign universities to build a modern professional base.
- Along with attempts to build a more educated workforce, Deng and the party also focused on another modernization: reforming the agriculture sector, a challenge faced by every Chinese government from the ancient Shang dynasty onward.
 - Abandoning Mao's commitment to communes, production teams of 30 or 40 families were contracted to produce a certain quantity of crops on land allotted to them. These communities could plan together to maximize production because they had

an incentive: If they produced more than their quota, they could keep the overage and sell it.

- This policy, along with the reinstatement of private markets, had immediate success in increasing national food production.
- Deng and the party also opened manufacturing up to foreign trade and new technology and welcomed international investment. As local entrepreneurs were able to concentrate on the production of consumer and export goods, foreign exports exploded. This increased both private and public income and led to surging development, particularly in those coastal areas that already had a long history of involvement in foreign trade, such as Hong Kong.

Hong Kong

- The manner in which the Chinese government handled the British return of Hong Kong in 1997 is a further example of pragmatism and economic rationality under Deng Xiaoping.
- Hong Kong had long been part of Chinese sovereign territory, but under the Qing dynasty, the British had used “gunboat diplomacy” to force the Chinese to cede Hong Kong to Britain for about a century and a half. During the Second World War, Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese from 1941 until it was liberated by British and Chinese troops in August 1945.
- A flood of labor from the mainland into Hong Kong in the 1950s transformed the territory into a major industrial manufacturing center. In the 1960s, as mainland China struggled economically, traditional Chinese values were increasingly challenged in Hong Kong by its booming capitalist economy. By the 1970s, Hong Kong was arguably the major tourism and commercial center of Southeast Asia.
- But as the fateful year of 1997 approached—the year in which, according to the treaty, the British government had agreed to hand Hong Kong back to Chinese control—many worried residents left



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Under its “special status,” Hong Kong has continued to thrive; new buildings are constantly being added to an already impressive skyline.

the island. After the handover of sovereignty, Hong Kong was designated by the government as a region of “special status,” and very little happened to change its position as a major tourism and economic hub.

Entering the 21st Century

- As the end of the 20th century approached, China could look back on 50 years of tumultuous change since the declaration of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 by Mao Zedong.
- The leadership of Deng Xiaoping had steered China away from the Legalist excesses of Maoism and toward a successful and stable economic future based on equitable ownership of agricultural land and the creation of an educated workforce to better manage the manufacturing and export sectors of the economy.
- The bloodshed in Tiananmen Square in 1989 had stained Deng’s reputation, but the peaceful return of Hong Kong not only

added a wealthy commercial center to the Chinese state but also demonstrated China's ability to govern with greater tolerance.

- As Deng's health deteriorated before his death in 1997, President Jiang Zemin and other members of his generation gradually assumed control of the day-to-day functions of government. This "third-generation" leadership was determined to take China into the 21st century as a stable, prosperous, and more moderate economic powerhouse.

The Economy of Japan

- The economies of China, Japan, South Korea, and other so-called Asian tiger nations underwent dramatic growth in the 20th century. Despite what some have called the Cocacolonization of the world, there has been a genuine commitment in these nations to embrace those Western ideologies that are critical for survival in the globalized village without completely abandoning the traditional cultural ideas that have sustained them for so long.
- After its defeat in 1945, Japan's economic revival was jumpstarted by policies promoted by the United States. So effective was the alliance between U.S. aid and Japanese industriousness that by 1949, the Japanese economy was already back to prewar output levels!
- In the same way that European postwar recovery benefited directly from the injection of cash and technology funneled through the Marshall Plan, the Japanese economy also received a "blood transfusion" in the form of \$2 billion in investment aid from the United States. Further, no restrictions were placed on the entry of Japanese goods into the U.S. market.
- The United States then signed a mutual defense treaty in 1960, stipulating that Japan could never spend more than 1 percent of its gross national product (GNP) on defense. (Earlier treaties had formalized Japan's relationship with the United States and its role in the international arena.) In essence, the United States took care

of Japanese defense, allowing Japan to invest virtually all of its GNP income back into the economy.

- The U.S. military commitment to Japan continues to the present day, with more than 35,000 military personnel and 5,000 civilians still stationed on bases in Japan.
- This continuing U.S. military involvement in Japan has many opponents.
- In the 1950s, Japanese economic planners decided to focus on pursuing export-driven economic growth, supported by low wages.
 - Japanese workers were prepared to work long hours for low wages during this initial period of recovery as part of a typically East Asian collectivist approach to solving their nation's problems.
 - Although Japan had to import raw materials, the low cost of labor ensured price-competitive production and export.
- During the 1950s, the Japanese economy churned out labor-intensive manufactured goods, such as textiles and steel. But by the 1960s, Japanese companies had generated such significant profits that they were able to invest in more capital-intensive manufacturing, producing higher-value consumer products, such as radios, televisions, motorcycles, and automobiles.
- In the decades that followed, Japanese corporations took advantage of what had by now become a highly skilled workforce to shift their resources to technology-intensive products, such as memory chips, LCDs, and CD-ROM drives. By the 1980s, the label "Made in Japan" signified state-of-the-art products of the highest quality.
- As their economy continued to grow, the Japanese government and financial institutions began to assume an increasingly prominent voice in global affairs. But in the 1990s, it became clear that Japanese growth rates were not sustainable, and the nation's economy sputtered into a recession that lasted into the 21st century.

Still, however, Japan has the third-largest economy in the world today.

Recent Economic Situation in East Asia

- The earliest and most successful imitators of the Japanese model were Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, and by the 1980s, these four “little tigers” had each become a major economic power.
- All four suffered from similar problems: a shortage of capital, few natural resources, and overpopulation. But like Japan a generation earlier, they transformed these disadvantages into advantages by focusing on export-driven industrialization. Indeed, the four quickly became serious competitors to Japan by imitating Japanese products and undercutting them with cheaper versions because of lower labor costs. Before long, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaya had also joined the “tigers club”!
- As we have seen, it was also in the 1980s that Chinese leaders reversed Mao’s economic plans and, instead, actively sought foreign investment and foreign technology. A new generation of highly educated managers and entrepreneurs was created, who used the incentives now built into the system to achieve spectacular levels of growth in all sectors. With the economy surging, the government officially signaled in 1992 that China had embraced a “socialist market economy.”
 - The role of government was transformed from central planner to an entity that provided a stable but competitive environment.
 - In December 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization and officially became a global economic superpower!
- President Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as the top leader of what was then the fourth-generation leadership of the People’s Republic of China. His low-key and reserved leadership style was a further example of China’s transition of leadership from old, hard-core communists to younger, more pragmatic economic technocrats.

- Hu reinstated some controls on the economy that had been relaxed by previous administrations, and he and his colleagues were also highly conservative in their attitude toward political reform.
- But in foreign policy, Hu and his colleagues pursued an approach that has been termed “China’s peaceful development,” using soft power in international relations.
- These policy approaches seem certain to continue under the new president, Xi Jinping.
- When the global financial crisis hit in 2008, China immediately launched an economic stimulus plan to deal quickly with the crisis and ward off potential recession. The plan focused on increasing affordable housing, easing credit restrictions for mortgages, lowering taxes on real estate sales and commodities, and pumping more public investment into infrastructure development. It has been a spectacular success.
- Today, China seems poised to move from export dependency to further development of its own massive internal market, particularly in the face of instability in the European economy. Some economic experts have predicted that China could become the world’s largest economy by as early as 2030, although others see this as unlikely. There is, however, every reason to believe that China will dominate the technology economy in the very near future.

Suggested Reading

Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

Haiwang Yuan, ed., *This Is China*, chapter 4.

Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*.

Tanner, *China: A History*, chapter 16.

Questions to Consider

1. Should Deng Xiaoping ultimately be credited with saving Chinese communism and preserving Chinese civilization?
2. What role did the United States play in the postwar economic recovery of Japan?

The Enduring Ideas of Eastern Civilization

Lecture 48

Throughout this course, we have explored the evolution of ideas across vast areas of geographical space and through eons of historical time, as we followed in the footsteps of great adventurers, warriors, rulers, peasants, and some of the greatest minds of all time. We have examined the development of the philosophy, science, religion, economics, politics, and social life of China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia and have measured their influence on other Eastern states, as well as their legacy in the contemporary world. In this final lecture, we will return to our definitions of key terms from the first lecture and then conclude by considering two foundational themes we have seen throughout the course: social and gender relationships.

Definitions Revisited

- In the first lecture of this course, we tried to unpack three key terms: foundations, Eastern, and civilization.
- We fixed the geographical scope of our course on China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia, although as we have seen repeatedly, to truly understand events in these regions, it has been necessary to trace connections between the Eastern Hemisphere and the rest of the world.
 - As a direct result of the expedition of Zhang Qian, the brave Han dynasty envoy who first breached the barriers of China's western frontier in his journey to Central Asia, China was linked into the great trading system of ancient Eurasia, and the Silk Roads began to flourish.
 - This connection made possible the spread of Buddhism out of India and into China, then on to Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Buddhist monks from all these countries later undertook journeys back to India to seek knowledge and inspiration.

- Later, the Mongols connected East Asia into a vast trans-Eurasian empire that made possible the transmission of many Eastern technological and intellectual inventions to the West, where they had a profound impact on subsequent world history.
- In the later stages of our course, we traced the often torturous connections that developed between all East Asian countries and the imperializing nations of the West.
- In our first lecture, we also came up with another interpretation of the word “Eastern”—as referring to those regions of the world that have been profoundly influenced by the culture of China. We traced this influence through language and writing, ideas about governance and administration, philosophy, social organization, economic management, and technological inventions. And we learned that despite the size and power of China, the other states of East Asia constructed their own societies that were much more than mere carbon copies of China.
- In our first lecture, we saw that most historians are wary of the word “civilization.” In its original Latin context, the word simply pertains to cities and their citizens—and we have certainly visited some splendid cities in this course: Changan, Beijing, Seoul, and others. But we also saw the dangers in the classical use of the word “civilization” when it is used to make a value judgment.
- We considered a third way of understanding “civilization”: as a concept that describes the entire culture of a complex society, the complete set of ideas, customs, and arts that make that culture distinctive, even unique.
 - Thus, we can talk about “Chinese civilization” as a genuine cultural entity, and we can define those characteristics that collectively add up to Chinese civilization: Confucian, Daoist, Legalist, and Buddhist ideology; imperial dynastic government; a strong emphasis on education; a collectivist as opposed to individualistic mindset; particular types of food and clothing; and so on.

- We can also, as we have done throughout this course, talk about “Eastern civilization” as the sum total of all the complex societies that emerged in the region—the complete set of ideas, customs, and arts of China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia that make Eastern civilization so unique.
- The last term we discussed in our introductory lecture was “foundations.” Here, we attempted to identify, define, and trace the development of all the significant cultural axioms, ideas, and principles that emerged within the construct that we defined as “Eastern civilization.” And then we tried to see how these core foundational ideas, principles, and technologies went on to influence the development of society and civilization within the East Asian region and, eventually, around the world.
- In the last three lectures, we have been intent on bringing our discussion of the evolution of all these ideas up to the present day.
 - We focused on government and politics in China and elsewhere in the 20th century; we returned to the theme of global connections as we traced the impact of the Cold War on the states of East Asia; and we looked at economic developments in the region since the Second World War.
 - At other places in the course, we commented on the continuing relevance of Confucianism in China today, an idea that has received strong support even from within the highest echelons of the Communist Party.
 - We have discussed developments in language and written script, such as the adoption of *Hangul* in Korea as a direct response to Japanese occupation and the development of Pinyin in mainland China after the Communist revolution.
 - We have also had quite a bit to say about the development of rich streams of art and literature throughout the course, from the ancient Zhou dynasty classics and magnificent Tang

poetry, through to Kabuki drama and even early-modern erotic novels in Japan.

Tiananmen Square, 1989

- Demonstrations in Tiananmen Square began on April 14, 1989, during a momentous year that saw the rapid collapse of communist governments around the world. The protests in Beijing were sparked by the death of Hu Yaobang, a Chinese government official known for tolerating dissent.
- On the day of Hu's funeral, 100,000 people gathered in Tiananmen Square, including many who were against the government's authoritarianism. Demonstrations quickly spread in the streets around the square, and large-scale protests broke out in other cities throughout China, including Shanghai.
- The protests lasted seven weeks until the government, driven by concerns for stability and, perhaps, a fear of being overthrown, decided to pursue a classic Legalist response by sending troops into the square on June 4.
- The number of deaths that ensued is not known; no video footage or written evidence of violence in the square has ever surfaced. Intelligence reports received by the Soviet Politburo estimated that 3,000 protesters were killed, but this number is impossible to verify. The government followed up the military assault by conducting widespread arrests of protesters and their supporters.
- China continues to grapple with the question of human rights, of course, with regular demands being made by individuals within the country and around the world for more participatory government and greater individual freedom. Commentators debate whether China will eventually democratize or remain a totalitarian one-party state under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.
 - Some argue that democracy itself might ultimately be undermined by the success of China and smaller communist countries. They point out that China is becoming a model

of booming development, political stability, affordable housing, successful social welfare, and more, all of which will have been achieved under the control of an authoritarian, nondemocratic regime.

- Many other China watchers argue that a second Tiananmen Square uprising is inevitable, because of such problems as increasing inequality, land ownership rights, environmental degradation, and corruption among officials.
- Certainly, the government has adopted many policies to try to solve these problems and improve the lives of the people: increasing spending in rural areas, abolishing taxes, cracking down on corruption, and attempting to increase the standard of living for all sectors of China's vast population. Some of these policies are remarkably similar to those adopted by many of China's ancient dynasties.

The One-Child Policy and Gender Roles

- China's one-child policy restricts the growth of urban families, although there are many exemptions for rural couples and minorities. The government claims that this policy has prevented more than 250 million births between 1978 and 2000.
- The policy is often criticized in the West for encouraging abortion and female infanticide, for creating a serious gender imbalance in China, and for a dramatic increase in female adoptions in the West. But a 2008 Pew Center survey of a large sample of the Chinese population showed that some 76 percent of the Chinese people support the policy.
- The gender imbalance is seen as a serious problem. According to 2010 statistics, with sex-specific abortions, 119 boys are being born for every 100 girls; projecting these figures forward shows that, by 2020, 24 million men of marrying age will have no chance of finding a female partner.



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Under communist rule, women in China are now more empowered to work outside the home, and foot binding, child marriages, prostitution, and arranged marriages have all been banned.

- Quite recently, the head of China's National Population and Family Commission announced the introduction of a series of measures to correct the gender imbalance of the policy, particularly a crackdown on illegal prenatal gender tests and selective abortions. The government also recently announced that the policy would remain in place until 2015 and would then be reassessed.
- Gender roles and relationships are changing in China and the rest of East Asia today. The success of the Communist revolution led to a significant reevaluation of women's roles, although the inherent contradiction between a woman as reproductive agent and a woman as equal partner and worker in society has hardly been resolved. Still, under communist rule, the social status of women, particularly educated urban women, in China has improved considerably.

The End of Our Journey

- China has enjoyed one of the longest and most continuous histories of any society on the planet, and traditions that emerged thousands of years ago continue to guide and influence Chinese development to the present day.
- At the same time, other East and Southeast Asian societies have developed their own fascinating and unique cultural traditions, partly in response and even resistance to the powerful influence of China.
- Our course has been a rich and diverse story of triumph and tragedy without parallel in world history—a story of emperors and peasants, princesses and concubines, Confucians and Legalists, Daoists and Buddhists, camels and silkworms, revolutions, war, and peace. Who can say how the story will continue to unfold in the 21st century? Whatever happens, it is sure to be just as rich and fascinating as the story of all the previous millennia of Eastern civilization.

Suggested Reading

Feigon, *China Rising*.

Haiwang Yuan, ed., *This Is China*, chapter 4.

Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the ongoing one-child policy tell us about the complex relationship between the Chinese government and its people?
2. What is the future of Eastern civilization?

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